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# THE PANJAB PAST AND PRESENT

Vol. XXII-I

April 1988

Serial No. 43



DEPARTMENT OF PUNJAB HISTORICAL STUDIES  
PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA

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## Editor's Note

The present special issue of the journal on Maharaja Ranjit Singh contains some of the scholarly research papers which were read and deliberated on the occasion of the celebration of the Archival Week organised by the Punjab State Archives, in Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar in the first week of March 1988. I earnestly felt that some of the papers presented over there required wider dissemination among the scholars working on the Punjab History. On my request Dr Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia, Director, Department of Cultural Affairs, Archaeology, Museums and Archives, Punjab, under whose stewardship the Seminar was held, promptly approved of this idea.

The article entitled "Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his Times" presented by Prof. Pritam Singh evoked special attention of the participants particularly of Sh. S. S. Ray, Governor of Punjab, who presided over the celebration. This article raised some important issues and pertinent bearings which are relevant to the current Punjab situation. The scholars who were present there elaborately discussed this paper and evolved a neo-term "Applied History."

Dr Madanjit Kaur in her article entitled "Cultural Significance of the Symbols on the coins of Maharaja Ranjit Singh : Documentary Evidence of his Secularism" has interpreted facts and pin-pointed certain features which were hitherto ignored or underestimated. Dr S.S. Bal's paper "Character of Ranjit Singh's Kingdom as seen by the British" was well received and provoked fruitful discussion on the variegated aspects of the basic characteristics of the kingdom as understood by the Englishmen.

I am sure, the inclusion of these articles in the present special issue will be appreciated both by the learned scholars and the general readers.

GURSHARAN SINGH  
*Chief Editor*

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## Character of Ranjit Singh's Kingdom as seen by the British

S. S. BAL

In this paper I have first examined how the British looked upon Ranjit Singh's kingdom both during the reign of the Maharaja himself and his successors and then examined why they annexed that kingdom to their empire in India. I have then underlined the discovery that they did not spell out the real reason why they had done so. In the reason given out by them in the Parliament, they characterised the state created by Ranjit Singh as Khalsa and theocratic in character. In the end I have traced how this view was challenged by a trio of brilliant historians who described Ranjit Singh as one of most brilliant figures of nineteenth century India. A creative genius, according to them, the state that he created was a well organised state based on the support of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims alike. If not exactly secure it was certainly most liberal in matters of religion and one entitles Ranjit Singh to be regarded not only a Punjabi but a national hero of the entire India.

Ranjit Singh rose on the wave that broke the Mughal administrative machinery in the land of five rivers and established its sway over it. The wave was symbolized by the Khalsa, a mystic entity that acted in the name of the ten successive gurus in disparate human forms but possessing one spiritual entity. The Khalsa successfully thwarted the attempt of the aggressive Afghan monarchy to include almost the entire Punjab within its fold but failed to establish a suitable polity that would continue its hold over the entire Punjab. Split into warring factions, the *misl*s, originally formed for the twin purposes to lead the Punjabi people against the weak but tyrannical Mughal administrative set up in the Punjab and fighting back the inroads of the Afghan monarchy, failed to set up a unified control over Punjab. It was Ranjit Singh who succeeded in doing what the *misl*s had failed to do after becoming the master of Lahore. He established a monarchy with claims over the entire Punjab.

Ranjit Singh had come to possess Lahore with the support of the

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\* Vice-Chancellor, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar.

Muslims of Lahore but set up a theocracy in the name of the Khalsa. He characterised the governme that the sent up at Lahore as *Sarkar Khalsaji* on the Baisakhi of 1801. He struck coins in the name of the Gurus and hastened to make tributories of the Dogra principality of Jammu and the Muslim chieftainship of Kasur. He followed this up by capturing Amritsar. He did not make the earlier masters of Amritsar tributories. He took incorporated Amritsar in his kingdom. He gave to Amritsar the shape of the holy city of all Sikhs. That went a long way in his winning over the fanatic Akalis in his future ventures. The most prominent among these Akalis was Akali Phula Singh. The Akalis harnessed their religious fervour behind Ranjit Singh as the Maharaja of the Punjab.

Ranjit Singh's quick succes of less than half a decade resulted in the establishment of a Sikh theocratic state which was modeled on the pattern of the one set up by Banda Bahadur almost nine decades earlier. That was at a time when the British, already established as a sovereign power in the southern and eastern India, were involved in a titanic conflict in Europe with France. That conflict was having its repercussions in India. Wellesley, the Governor-General of India then, had initiated the policy of forcing subsidiary alliances with the princely states of India and had snatched away the control of Delhi from the Marathas and brought the so-called Mughal Emperor under British protection. The Cis-Sutlej chiefs were to get the impringe of that policy soon after Ranjit Singh had proclaimed himself as the Maharaja. They were in practice forced to accept the suzerainty of the British, the supplanters of the Marathas at Delhi. The British also became the masters of the territory around Hansi when they took over what was once the principality of the Irish adventurer, Thomas. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was cultivated as a friend in the belief that he was a potential ally and would defend not only for himself but also the British the traditional gateway of invaders from Central Asia. That he would not come in conflict with the British or challenge their bid to overthrow the Marathas to become the suzerains of India was proved in January 1806 when he, together with Fateh Singh Ahluwalia, entered into a treaty with the British General, Lake, by which they literally drove back Jaswant Rao Polker from Amritsar. The British became the *de facto* sovereigns of the Cis-Sutlej Punjab without giving it a *de jure* assertion.

In his attempt to become the Maharaja of the entire Khalsa,



Ranjit Singh took calculated risk when Wellesley was recalled by the Court of Directors of the East India Company and his aggressive policy of active interference in the princely states in India was changed to that of non-intervention in their affairs by Cornwallis and Barlow. In a couple of well planned adventures in 1807 and 1808 Ranjit Singh invaded the Cis-Sutlej Punjab to proclaim himself the Maharaja of the Khalsa all over the Punjab but gave up his ambition when he learnt after his third invasion of that territory that the British had finally decided on not making room for him to the south and east of Sutlej. He entered into the famous Treaty of Amritsar with the British on 25 April 1809. He accepted Sutlej as the boundary between the British Empire rapidly moving towards the north west of the country and the territory allotted to him in the treaty for expanding his kingdom. Ranjit Singh made the best of the British preoccupation elsewhere in India and within the brief span of four years conquered the entire Central Punjab and made the Trans-Sutlej hill principalities of which Kangra was the most important as his vassals. He also began meticulous preparation for penetrating into the Afghan strongholds in the Land of Five Rivers.

An important change took place in the south eastern boundary of Ranjit Singh's rapidly expanding kingdom. That change was as much the result of a well designed policy followed by him as the consequence of the Anglo-Gurkha war of 1815-16. His hold over Kangra was established in 1809 and the boundary of his kingdom began touching the British empire on the Punjab Hills also. The chance of conflicts with the British increased but all of them were circumscribed by his discretion and the British understanding the delicacy of his position on the hills. Boundary States of Bilaspur, Kulu and Bushair with territories on both sides of the Sutlej were not allowed to create any tensions both by the English and the Maharaja. Sansar Chand's repeated requests for British protection did not get a favourable response.

In the closing year of the second decade of the nineteenth century, Ranjit Singh conquered two important strongholds of the Afghans. He conquered Multan in 1818 and Kashmir in 1819. He had already become the master of Attock fort in 1813. His becoming the masters of the Afghan strongholds in the Punjab increased his stock with the British masters of India. The fear of French mechanations making

room for Russo-phobia helped the framers of the British policy makers of the Indian Government's to take a favourable view of Ranjit Singh's expansion towards north west of the Punjab. His conquests of Multan and Kashmir, one can safely presume, were as welcome to the British as his penetration into the Trans-Indus part of India and obtaining complete control of the Khyber Pass. That the top policy makers among the British should have taken Wade's side in his disputes with Murray in the 1820's over the Cis-Sutlej possessions of Ranjit Singh had a logic of imperial interest behind them. The British Government of India was most keen on keeping Ranjit Singh in good humour in the 1820's and the first half of the 1830's.

The British did not seem to have appreciated the big change that Ranjit Singh had brought about in the character of the state he was heading while extending his kingdom in all directions of Lahore. Without giving up the title of *Sarkar Khalsa*, he did his best to win over the diverse elements constituting the ever increasing peoples in his kingdom. He built up a *darbar* which gave prominent places to Dogras, the Syeds and Khattris of the Punjab. He retained the Khalsa irregulars in the cavalry but built up a regular infantry with a sizeable number of Hindus in it. He raised an artillery, dominated by Muslims. He created room for these diverse elements by reducing not only the numbers but also the importance of old *misdars*. He did it to an extent that his state almost assumed a secular look. The composition of the state machinery administering the state reflected the change in the character of the state. Instead of being a state of the Khalsa it became a liberal state with catholic outlook. Ranjit Singh now extended his patronage to all 'holy places' irrespective of the religion of the individuals or institutions controlling those places. The Muslims were a majority in the state that he had built by the time he died and the Khalsa microscopic minority in his state. He made conscious effort to associate the Punjabi Muslims with the administration of the state while eliminating Afghan principalities in the Land of the Five Rivers towards the north and west of Sutlej. He made merit as his chief yardstick for recruitment and promotion in his kingdom. Able people from Utter Pradesh as much as from Kashmir won recognition under him. Foreign adventurers with organising talents came to him and got prominent positions in the higher rungs of the state administrative

machinery. Jagirs ceased to be the monopoly of Sikh Sardars and descendants of Sikh Gurus. *Dharamarths* began to be given as much to the *gurudwaras* as to the *mandirs* and *masjids*. Though Muslims were not allowed the *azan* and do kine killing, their holy men were given both respect and patronage.

The British did not appreciate the altered character of the state built up by Ranjit Singh but continued to have a soft corner for it in the mistaken belief that Ranjit Singh's state was a Sikh state based on close Hindu-Sikh alliance and basically opposed to the Muslims. They looked upon Ranjit Singh's kingdom entertaining strong anti-Afghan feelings. They believed this state suited them as a good buffer between the Afghans and the British for two important reasons. It was a stable state and it was strong enough to resist the Afghans in case the latter took to an anti-British adventure on their own when instigated by some strong powers in Europe and Asia to do so.

The British continued to like the strong state created by Ranjit Singh right till his death. They continued doing it even after they began suffering from acute Russo-phobia in the 1830's. Wooing of Ranjit Singh that they had been doing right from 1801 and which was increased after the Treaty of Amritsar that they signed on 9 April 1809 was further increased. That, of course, created problems particularly after the British had decided on bringing Afghanistan under their influence. They could involve Ranjit Singh in replacing an anti-British ruler at Afghanistan by a pro-British one after considerable difficulty.

The friendly attitude of the British towards the state created by Ranjit Singh continued for some time even after the death of the great Maharaja. Zorawar Singh's conquest of Leh, Ladakh and Balistan did not worry them. It was only when Zorawar Singh tried to penetrate into Tibet that they felt worried. But that was because they felt the penetration of Lahore armies might compromise their position with the Chinese with whom they were then carrying on negotiation to end the Opium War.

The basic approach of the British even after Ranjit Singh had changed the character of his state from a theocracy to a liberal state committed to tolerance of all religious communities inhabiting it did not attract the British attention. They continued regarding Ranjit Singh's kingdom as a theocratic Sikh state opposed to the Muslims and, therefore, a useful buffer between the British empire in India and

the Muslim state of Afghanistan.

## II

The way the British decided on annexing the kingdom created by Ranjit Singh almost a decade after the death of Ranjit Singh would underline their belief in the Sikh character of the state created by Ranjit Singh. The British annexed that kingdom on 29 March 1849. The circumstances that led them to do that underline the fact that this indeed was the British view of the state. From that point of view, it is worth recounting that the Irish adventurer Thomas had suggested that the British should conquer the kingdom that Ranjit Singh was threatening to create as early as 1801 but the then Governor-General had decided not to do so for reasons already given. The British decision makers had resisted the temptation to do so not only throughout the reign of Ranjit Singh but for some times even later. When finally the British decided to do so the reasons that were put across by the Governor-General why that had become necessary needs to be noted very carefully.

The rise of the army *panchas* had much to do with the British finally deciding on annexing Ranjit Singh's kingdom. A closer look on the rise of the *panchas* and their developing into a powerful factor in the politics of the state after the death of Ranjit Singh would be worthwhile. The *panchas* were first instituted during the civil war that had rocked the state between 5 November 1840 and 18 January 1841 but had become a regular institution by 1844. It had made and unmade the Maharajas and killed Prime Ministers and important functionaries of the state by 1844. The *panchas* had taken over the leadership of the Army and played decisive role in every crisis following the internecine civil war of a couple of months between the supporters of Mai Chand Kaur and Kanwar Sher Singh in 1840-41. On 15 September 1843 they had got murdered both the Maharaja and the Prime Minister of the state and placed a minor son of Ranjit Singh on the throne and elevated latter's mother to the position of the virtual ruler of the state. On 21 December 1844 they had got the Prime Minister Hira Singh assassinated.

In the assassination of Hira Singh, Hardinge, the Governor General of India, since 23 July 1844 saw the emergence of a big problem for him as the Governor-General. He felt anxious. His anxiety was two-fold. Primarily he feared that the state left behind by Maharaja Ranjit

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Singh which had hitherto acted as a useful buffer was now heading towards dismemberment. In the convulsion and the mutinous state of the army that manifested itself on the assassination of Hira Singh, he saw the disintegration of the Lahore kingdom left behind by Ranjit Singh as imminent. He believed that the Lahore state would soon lose the hills to the Dogras under Gulab Singh. In the Muslim majority areas of Kashmir, Multan and trans-Indus there would emerge Muslim states. What would then remain would be an extremely weak Sikh state at Lahore. Would then the Afghan frontier be defended? Would then even the Sutlej boundary of the British possessions be safe? Hardinge did not feel sure. Believing that the successors of Ranjit Singh had not only weakened the state created by the genius of Ranjit Singh but brought it to a point of imminent disintegration he felt convinced it would not last. He was of the strong view that if the hold of the Sikh rulers at Lahore were not to survive in the entire Lahore kingdom as left by Ranjit Singh the British must take over the kingdom. In fact, he began to concentrate British troops on the frontier of the Lahore kingdom to do so. He hinted to Ripon, the President of the Board of Control in the Tory Ministry of Peel that he was making preparations to do so.

The eventuality envisaged by Hardinge did not arise but it led to an important correspondence with Ripon. Ripon did not share Hardinge's apprehensions. He regarded Hardinge's fears of the dangers arising from the emergence of the Muslim States as illusory. He, perhaps, doubted whether these powers would ever come into existence. In the emergence of the Dogra state on the hills which perhaps he expected, he actually saw the solution of the defence of Afghan frontier. Two weak states, not quite friendly, but looking to the British for advice could in fact be made to play that role.

It is this arrangement of two weak states between the British boundary and the Afghan that was effected by the victorious Hardinge after the First Anglo-Sikh War of December 1845—January 1846. It was done firstly by reducing both the resources and the army of the Lahore state which was allowed to exist after the war. This was done by stipulating in the Treaty ending the war that the army would reduce to one-fourth of its former strength. The resources of the state were further reduced by taking away the Jalandhar Doab, the richest of the areas under it.

The Rajput state on the hills was created by another Treaty

signed with Gulab Singh, the Jagirdar of the Lahore state holding Jammu. It was intended to act as a counterpoise to the Sikh state so that both might look to the British for advice. To make a sufficiently strong counterpoise to the Sikhs, not only Jammu was made independent of Lahore state but also Kashmir and Hazara, when offered for the war indemnity by the Lahore Darbar, on behalf of the defeated Government of the kingdom created by Ranjit Singh with latter's son as its Maharaja were now transferred to Gulab Singh. In fact, by doing this Gulab Singh was placed as to enable him to play the role of defending the Afghan frontier in collaboration with the Sikh state much more effectively because the boundary of the state under him extended right to the trans-Indus districts of the Sikh state.

The two Treaties of Lahore and Amritsar ending the First Anglo-Sikh War began a new phase in the British attitude towards the Ranjit Singh state under Dalip Singh. Hardinge would have preferred annexation, had it been possible without a long war. But once new arrangements had been made, he seems to have been sincere in giving them a trial. That he agreed to leave the British troops at Lahore only for nine months reveals his reluctance to place the Punjab under a permanent subsidiary system.

But could the Government that had emerged from the Sikh War stand after the British had withdrawn their troops from Lahore? It was an important question which assumed a special urgency for him when he heard of his own ministry resigning in England and his political opponents taking over. That forced him to go in for a new arrangement in the Punjab in the form of the Treaty of Bhairawal.

The Treaty of Bhairawal began a novel experiment by the British. It was never tried in any of the Indian states so far. The old administrative machinery was kept intact with the Darbar at Lahore, and *Nazims* and *Kardars* spread out. But they had side by side the British Resident at Lahore and his assistants wherever he deemed it proper to place them. The Resident was all powerful, but how was he to conduct himself in relation to the Darbar and the subordinates under it? This was an important matter because the success or the failure of the experiment was to depend on it. Hardinge evidently did not give enough thought to the problem. He left it to the discretion of the man on the spot.

The intention of the arrangement made by the Treaty of Bhairawal was to put the Lahore State on a sound footing so that after eight years

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when Dalip Singh was to become major it might be able to play the role of the buffer effectively. But that did not happen.

The Punjab arrangements made under the Treaty of Bhairawal broke down within a couple of years because of the wide spread rebellion against the British supervision of the Punjab administration under the provisions of the Treaty of Bhairawal. The rebellion that so took place proved a long drawn affair. It began in March 1848 at Multan and suffered a defeat a year later after passing through three stages. The first was from the start of Mulraj's revolt to the beginning of the revolt by Chatter Singh Attariwala in the third week of August 1848. It assumed the character of the wide spread Punjab revolt when his son Sher Singh Attariwala left the Multan front and joined him. The third stage began from 14 September 1848 and ended with the formal annexation of the Lahore kingdom on 29 March 1849.

Dalhousie decided on annexing the kingdom before the revolt going on had assumed the character of what Dalhousie was to characterise as 'national revolt of the Sikhs' whom they were protecting under the terms of the Treaty of Bhairawal. That he had taken such a decision was conveyed by him to the President of Board of Control on 8 August 1848 not in an official but a private communication. He detailed the reasons why he had decided to do so in the private letter that he wrote on 15 August 1848.

This letter was written by Dalhousie "currente calamo without a draft" and was "sent off with all its sins of omission or repetition on its head." It was written under the impression created on Dalhousie of a conspiracy at Lahore that aimed at turning the British out of northern India with most of the chiefs of the Lahore state promising co-operation to the revolt when begun. Dalhousie argued that this absolved the British of their commitment made in the Treaty of Bhairawal and justified adopting a new arrangement for the British management of the Lahore kingdom. The argument given by Dalhousie for adopting one of the four alternatives before the British at the moment deserve careful attention. They underline what had been the British view of the character of the Lahore kingdom created by Ranjit Singh.

According to Dalhousie, the British at the moment had four alternatives before them. Two of them were deserving of special notice. One of these was to take Multan, hang Mulraj, punish the most guilty

of his followers and then "forgive and forget the rest, and continue our protection (of Maharaja Dalip Singh) until the expiry of the term fixed in 1854." It could not be adopted. It had failed in preventing the very people they had undertaken to protect under the terms of the Treaty of Bhairawal. Dalhousie had no hope of solving the problem by changing the personnel of the Darbar :

...the result of the Experiment is such as to have satisfied me and others who know the people we deal with better than I, that we have not a reasonable ground for believing that we shall ever be able to build up a strong and friendly Government to rule the Punjab.

This was because

the materials are wanting to do so. There never has been a *Punjab nation* for centuries. It has been a congeries of independent and baffling tribes, until the strong mind and strong arm of Runjeet reduced the whole into obedience to himself, the head of the dominant sect, the Sikhs. Since he passed away, there has not been even a pretender to the possession of either the strong mind or the strong arm.

The other of the two important alternatives was to annex the Lahore state. That the Lahore state was seething with anti-British feeling made annexation indispensable. It had become necessary for the very reason which made the British earlier desire a friendly Sikh state as a buffer and not take there frontier to the Afghan border. They should annex it, he explained,

In order to secure the permanent peace of India and to remove the Evil of a turbulent Enemy on our frontier, whereby the subjects of our states would be endangered and our attention and our means diverted from the measures, which we have designed for increasing the prosperity of our Country and the happiness of our people.

The sum and substance of the letter was "that we shall not succeed in establishing a friendly Sikh State" and

to go on now with the same policy is only to make great pecuniary sacrifice and needlessly to subject ourselves to great labour and anxiety for an object we shall fail in obtaining.

Since the Lahore State, according to him, had violated the treaties, the British had a right to adopt any policy they chose. He felt



that out of the four alternative policies that lay before them, the best was to annex the State which he suggested "we ought to do so at once." Dalhousie, in fact, felt so strongly about the necessity of annexing the Lahore kingdom that he began asking "in strict confidence," people who had the "knowledge of the country and long experience of the whole question" as to "what force and troops, etc., will be requisite, after the capture of Multan, to ensure our being able to take forcibly possession of the whole Punjab."

Dalhousie had thus suggested and planned the annexation of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's kingdom left behind by the latter to his successors when the Punjab revolt had not assumed a "national character." The revolt of Chattar Singh Attariwala had begun fifteen days earlier but Dalhousie had no idea of it. In all probability even after he had received the information of it, he did not regard it as the beginning of the "national revolt." He seems to have felt that it was a local rising, like the one of Multan, and could be crushed by the British Resident, Sir Frederick Currie, with his headquarters at Lahore, if not Abbot, the British Assistant of Currie at Hazara.

It was the defection of Sher Singh Attariwala from the British side to that of Dewan Mulraj on 14 September that really began the "national revolt." While doing that he had issued a proclamation and called upon the Sikh community to "act with all their heart and soul" against the British. His proclamation declared :

By the direction of the holy Gooroo, Raja Sher Singh and others, with their valiant troops, have joined the trusty and faithful Dewan Mulraj, on the part of the Maharaja Duleep Singh, with a view to eradicate and expel the tyrannous and crafty feringees.

Sher Singh's proclamation described as a manifesto by the British did not produce any immediate impact. That was because Mulraj suspected Sher Singh's bonafides in issuing the manifesto. He refused Sher Singh's admission into the Multan Fort and directed him to encamp in Hazari Bagh under the very guns of his fort. Under the circumstances, Sher Singh did not stay at Multan for long. He moved out of Multan on 9 October to carry on the fight against the British in the north which henceforth became the main centre of the war.

To Dalhousie the defection of Sher Singh from the British to the Mulraj's side and issuing the manifesto mentioned above came very handy in publicly declaring what he had already suggested privately to the President of the Board of Control that he was now engaging the

British troops for the annexation of the Lahore kingdom to the British empire in India. He gave an indication of his doing that to the Indians at large in a speech that he delivered at a hall in Barrackpore on 5 October 1848. In this speech he referred to the defection of Sher Singh and the Darbar Army from the siege of Multan and to Sher Singh's manifesto and declared :

- I hoped to see prosperity and peace realised over this vast empire. I have striven for peace, I have longed for it. But since the Sikh nation desire war, on my word they shall have it, and with a vengeance.

That provoked the rebels under Chatter Singh and Sher Singh to fight back with all the earnestness they could muster and the war was waged by both the rebel forces and the British armies in earnest. In an official letter Dalhousie wrote to the British Resident at Lahore, Fredrick Currie

The Governor-General in Council considers the state of Lahore to be, to all intents and purposes, directly at war with the British.

The war from now onwards was fought in much greater earnestness by the British than they had done so far. From the British point of view the British suffered reverses that caused some anxiety to the Governor-General. That was particularly so because for him the stake was high. It was the annexation of the Lahore kingdom to the British empire in India.

Dalhousie had told his council that he was not fighting to annex the Punjab before the war in the Punjab had assumed the "national" character but had decided to do so now. In a carefully drafted Minute he gave the reason why he was out to annex the Lahore kingdom. It should be carefully noted that he specially mentions the "Hindu" character of the Lahore kingdom while arguing for its annexation. In a Minute of 11 September 1848 he had written :

I sincerely desired, as is well known to the Council, to avoid the necessity for totally subjecting the Punjab to the British Rule—

I think it ought to be avoided as long as any chance can be supposed to exist of a strong Hindoo Government being formed.

But this he proceeded to write would not be possible and so Punjab should be annexed :

I do not, however, hesitate to express a clear opinion that the experience of the two years, and more especially of the last four

months, has almost conclusively proved that such a Government is not to be looked for.

Under these circumstances, I conceive that regard for the security of our frontier, for the tranquility of our own Provinces, for the maintenance of the reputation of our own name and of the conviction of our own power will not permit us to pass over such national outrages as are now being committed against us in the Punjab and that we shall in the end be compelled to this Govt. which cannot rule its own subjects or control its ungovernable Army, and to take possession of the country in order to ensure the peace and security of our own.

Dalhousie's wordings in the Minutes, as would be expected in an official communication was cautious and only hinted at what he felt the British would be eventually required to do. But he was sure that this was what would have to be done. He had already

addressed to the Commander-in-Chief some weeks ago a Secret and Confidential communication requesting him to favour me with his opinion as to the military force which would be necessary in the event of the British Government being compelled to resort to extreme measures, to enable us with facility to take possession of the Punjab, disband its army, disarm its forts. I requested his opinion as to the force which would be necessary to retain secure possession of the country when we had taken it.

Clearly Dalhousie has made up his mind about annexing the Lahore kingdom bequeathed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh to his successors quite a good deal earlier than the Multan revolt had spread out and become a 'national' revolt. And that was because it had ceased to be the good buffer between the British Empire in India and the powerful European-cum-Asian power that could use Afghanistan in its design to penetrate into the interior of India where the British had already established themselves as the suzerain.

The real reason why the British annexed the Lahore kingdom bequeathed by Ranjit Singh to his successors was not spelt out to the British Parliament. The papers relating to the Punjab 1848-49 that were circulated in the British Parliament soon after Dalhousie annexed the Lahore kingdom built up the thesis that after September 1848 the 'Sikh nation' had waged an ungrateful war against the British who had done their best to help it maintain its sovereignty over the Punjab

north of the river Sutlej. The villain in the blood stained drama which led to the Lahore kingdom lose its sovereignty was not the Government of the East India Company but the Sikh army and the dominant section of the Lahore Darbar. They had joined hands to convert a local revolt at Multan into a full fledged war to re-establish the Khalsa sway over not only the Punjab north of the Sutlej but even to its south upto Delhi if not beyond. This explanatory thesis became the official version of how the kingdom built up by Ranjit Singh and bequeathed to his weak successors lost its entity and incorporated into the British Empire in India on 29 March 1849.

One of the important premises on which this thesis was sold to the British Parliament was on the nature of the kingdom built up by Ranjit Singh. The premises was that the kingdom built by Ranjit Singh was a Khalsa Raj not only during the first decade of its existence but throughout his reign and the reigns of his successors. This presumption coloured most British historical writing on Ranjit Singh and his kingdom throughout the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. The chapter entitled 'The Conquest of Sind and Punjab' in the sixth volume of the *Cambridge History of India* gave to this thesis an academic acceptability at the highest level. The view that Ranjit Singh's kingdom was a theocratic state which the secular British were forced to occupy became an integral part of historical thinking on the modern period of Indian history throughout the British rule in India.

The view thus formed of the character of Ranjit Singh's kingdom was first challenged by a group of historians in the late twenties and the thirties of the present century. That was done on the basis of Persian, Urdu and Punjabi sources which had been largely ignored by the historians who had written on the Maharaja so far. The first among them was G.L. Chopra, the second N. K. Sinha and the third was the doyen of Punjab historians, Sita Ram Kohli.

G L. Chopra published *The Punjab as a Sovereign State* in 1928. He depicted Ranjit Singh as a great national hero of the Indian people. The Maharaja "brought the scattered people of the Punjab under a uniform and consistent system of government; and thereby evolved a young and vigorous nation. Herein lies the justification, if this be necessary for that policy of 'blood and iron' which 'Ranjit Singh followed to this end.' It deserves to be noticed that while depicting Ranjit Singh as national hero the historian thus challenging the pre-

valent view of Ranjit Singh talks of Punjabi nationality and not of the Sikh nation. The author of *The Punjab as a Sovereign State* highlights Maharaja Ranjit Singh reversing the tide against the Afghans with the help of his well organised efficient army and thereby rendering a single service more to the Punjab as a whole than the Sikhs. Before him, the Punjab was merely a geographical expression. During his reign, the various and diverse communities of the Punjab were welded into a well-organised state. Chopra, the historian, shows a good deal of understanding in evaluating Ranjit Singh. While doing his assessment of Ranjit Singh he does not ignore "unpleasant facts" but all the same minimises them. "We should keep in mind" Chopra insists "the circumstances of the age in which he was brought up." Most of the time, Chopra keeps on modifying the views expressed by the British writers. According to him, if one were to consider the social and political condition of the country over which he ruled, the government of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was "surprisingly mild and merciful." He gave to his subjects a more consistent and uniform system of administration and a greater amount of peace and prosperity that they had enjoyed for over a century.

N.K. Sinha, the other historian who gave a new interpretation of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his times published his book entitled *Ranjit Singh* in 1933. Sinha openly looked upon the Maharaja from the stand point of Indian nationalism. The Maharaja successfully secured the support of his people—Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims; and he secured the frontiers against the Afghans. Sinha feels sure that "if Ranjit Singh had not established his monarchy and if the disorganised *misls* had retained their hold over the Punjab, at least the North-Western Frontier Region and Kashmir would have become a part of Afghanistan under the Barakzais." Sinha does not ignore the weakness of Ranjit Singh's state underlined by his relations with the British but does not hold the Maharaja responsible for it. Sinha suggests that the relation built up by Ranjit Singh became the chief cause of the final collapse of his kingdom within a decade of his death. According to Sinha under the relations that the Maharaja developed with the British, he was the horse and the latter the rider. He further suggests that a collision between the military monarchy of Lahore and British imperialism was inevitable. To quote Sinha "Perhaps with the solitude inherent in all builders he feared to expose the kingdom he had created to the risks of war" and while dealing with the British "chose the policy of

yielding, yielding and yielding." Sinha, however, understands the helplessness of Ranjit Singh in picking up cudgels against the British during his life time or do anything which would prevent his successors from losing the state created by him to the British. For Sinha the final annexation of Ranjit Singh's kingdom was inherent in the logic of the historical situation : "all causes that were not the cause of Rome were destined to be lost."

Both G.L. Chopra and N.K. Sinha succeeded in depicting Ranjit Singh as a national hero by using the non-British sources in writing on Ranjit Singh in addition to the ones that had been used or continued to be used by most of the other historians of Ranjit Singh and his times. G.L. Chopra used the Persian works of Sohan Lal, Mufti Aliuddin, Bute Shah and Khushwaqt Rai apart from the official correspondence of the British Agents at Ludhiana and Ambala ; accounts of European and Indian travellers ; publications of the officials of the East India Company, including the works of the historians ; and the works of the British administrators who wrote after the British had annexed the Ranjit Singh's kingdom under his son, Maharaja Dalip Singh. Chopra perhaps was obliged to use a much larger range of sources on Ranjit Singh than had been used by those who wrote on Ranjit Singh earlier. His work on Ranjit Singh was originally presented to the University of London as a doctoral thesis. N.K. Sinha also used the same sources that Chopra had consulted with a few additional ones that he could discover from the National Archives of India, New Delhi, and the Khuda Baksh Library, Patna. N.K. Sinha's work was also originally a doctoral thesis though not of the London but the Calcutta University.

While G.L. Chopra and N.K. Sinha were preparing for their doctoral's, a young Punjabi scholar had begun talking interest in Ranjit Singh. His interest was aroused by his work on Persian manuscripts of Ranjit Singh's times at Lahore. Sita Ram Kohli had started his scholarly career as a Research Assistant employed to examine these sources. He went through the entire records of the Khalsa Darbar compare and contrast the information contained in them with the information available in other Persian sources and the writings of contemporary European writers. He published the Catalogue of the Records in two volumes, the first in 1919 and the second in 1927. On the basis of information that he could collect while working on the Khalsa Darbar Records at Lahore, Kohli published a biography of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1933. Significantly

he published this biography in Urdu, the State language of the Punjab then. By the time Kohli had published this book, he was deeply engrossed in the study of Ranjit Singh and his times. He had already written some authoritative articles on one or the other aspects of Ranjit Singh's administration. He had already become an authority on Ranjit Singh. His writings on Ranjit Singh, however, were till 1933 piecemeal and did not present the complete picture of Ranjit Singh and his Times. His work on Ranjit Singh in Urdu was his first and only attempt to deal with Ranjit Singh as a whole. His book truly represented the sum and substance of his prolonged deliberations on the subject and the hitherto unused sources available on it at Lahore. Little wonder it was evaluated as a book "which for its authenticity, detail and presentation may easily be regarded as the best work on the subject."

Kohli did not take the extreme position that Chopra and Sinha had taken on Ranjit Singh as a national hero but did not contradict them either. Understandably, therefore, he inspired a series of studies on Ranjit Singh and his times both before and after India became a free country. Kohli himself jumped over to studying the post Ranjit Singh period of Sikh history to understand the extinction of the state created by the Maharaja within ten years of his death. He started studying the decade between 1839 and 1849 when things moved fast with a view to understanding the way they contributed to the downfall of the kingdom created by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. In spite of all his experience as a historian he could not give a final shape to his conclusions but what he left behind clearly indicates that he was not opposed to the views of Sinha and Chopra on the place of Ranjit Singh in Indian history as a national hero. Kohli decries the crisis created by the several changes of the government in the Lahore kingdom left behind by Ranjit Singh in six years following the death of Ranjit Singh, each accompanied by violence and bloodshed. He does not take kindly to the advantage taken by the British of these crises. He categorically states in his incomplete study of this period that it was as a result of the violent revolutions caused at once by internal factions and external intrigues, Lahore Government lost its balance and prestige, giving rise to conditions of dangerous political instability in the country. He asserts that the British victory in the war of 1845-46 gave the winners a firm foothold on the soil of the Punjab. Once this happened, Kohli suggests, the foreign rulers were quick to exploit their position of

strength and within four years of their first entrance successfully deprived the Lahore kingdom of its independence and made it one of the many provinces of the British Empire of India.

A contradictory view of Ranjit Singh and his kingdom had succeeded in taking an important place in the academic studies by 1939, the centenary year of the death of Ranjit Singh. It constituted the central theme of a volume of articles published by Khalsa College Amritsar to celebrate the occasion. What had made it possible for this view to emerge and develop was the discovery and use of non-English and non-Governmental records of the East India Company on Ranjit Singh and his times. It is this, more than anything else, which justifies.



## Functioning of Sarkar Khalsa— Some Fundamental Issues Concerning Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Polity

JASBIR SINGH AHLUWALIA\*

Maharaja Ranjit Singh endeavoured to usher in an open, pluralistic society characterised by the values of "secularism", justice, liberty and equality. This was a new revolutionary humanistic ethos in the medieval age that otherwise was marked by religious bigotry, communal exclusiveness, sectarian inwardness and compartmentalised value-system. In contrast to the earlier internecine war-fare on the religio-communal plane, the Maharaja brought in an atmosphere of peaceful co-existence of all faiths ensuring for all the fundamental right to freedom of conscience.

What is more important than the guarantee of religious freedom on the individual level is the fact that the Maharaja on the institutional level, diverging from the medieval-age theocratic thought-patterns and praxis, effected secularization of state power and its forms by positively drawing a distinguishing line between the temporal power and the theo-ecclesiastical authority. That is why he did not declare Sikhism as the state religion, nor sought to follow a theocratic system. No proselytism was permitted through state power directly or indirectly. The Lahore Darbar presented a non-sectarian picture with key portfolios being given on considerations other than those of religio-communal nature. His Prime Minister was Dogra Dhian Singh; Faqir Aziz-ud-Din was in charge of External Affairs; the Home Department was handled by Faqir Nur-ud-Din, while Finance was taken care of by Hindu experts such as Diwan Bhawani Dass, Ganga Ram, etc. To give a concrete, determinate shape to the principle of religious freedom, the Maharaja gave to his Muslim subjects the right to their public and private law in the administration of justice, for which the courts of *qazis* and *muftis* were retained and recognized. The same spirit is exhibited by his tax system which did not admit of any discrimination like the one that informed the imposition of *jazia*.

This liberal, tolerant and secular policy of the Maharaja was due

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primarily to the influence of the pluralistic pattern of state and society as envisaged in Sikhism which heralded a new universalistic value-pattern in its world-historical mission. In analysing the Maharaja's regime, an attempt is sometimes made in certain circles to contradistinguish the Sikh religious tradition from the Punjabi tradition. The premises of this view point are that the first tradition is of communal character and implies a theocratic polity, while the second one of liberal, secular character and further that due to this difference the two forces are mutually exclusive. From this angle it is contended that the liberal, secular policies of the Maharaja implied his switch-over from the sectarian Sikh tradition to the transcendent Punjabi tradition. This line of argument then leads to the contention that Ranjit Singh with a view to broaden the socio-political basis of his regime, drew upon encouraged Punjabi nationalism as a substitute for the Sikh communitarian consciousness. The weakness of this argument is apparent from the fact that after the death of the Maharaja, the forces of Punjabi nationalism were nowhere seen asserting themselves and rallying behind the *Raj* against external onslaught and internal sabotage.

The premises of this argument referred to above are neither logically nor historically tenable and betray lack of comprehension of the ideational character of the Sikh revolution and the historical forms of its expression and instrumentation in the context of which alone can we understand the dynamics of the Maharaja's policies and practices aimed at *Punjabi* as a creative synthesis of the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh elements.

As rightly observed by Arnold Toynbee, Sikhism emerged as a higher religion destined to serve as a chrysalis for the birth of a new social and statal pattern; it possessed historical potential for a new civilization in the Indian sub-continent qualitatively different from the earlier civilizations.<sup>1</sup> Seen in the process, *Punjabi* arose in a new form as one of the historical instruments for realising the new civilization promised by the Sikh movement. In other words Sikhism as the ideological expression of the nescient and nebulous historical forces of the emerging era arose as a revolutionary surge for a new pattern of society partaking of the post-feudal value-pattern. For this purpose Sikhism carved out for its revolutionary praxis a new ideational basis—different from that of the reformist Bhakti movement—by evolving a new spiritualist—materialist mode of thought in place of the old

1. *India and Hindu* (A study of History, Vol. V, p. 607.

spiritualist-idealist tradition. This new thought-pattern invests the world of time and space not only with existential being but also with law (*hukam*) operating from within, thereby making the material reality work in an autonomous, de-centralized way. This concept is the metaphysical basis for a new pluralistic society envisioned in Sikhism as against the old pattern of society uni-centred, for its being as well as sustenance, on an over-centralized Divine Authority which alone was real, the rest being all *maya* or *lila*.

The Sikh concept of pluralistic society is essentially of a multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-racial society, termed as *halemi raj* by Guru Arjun. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's liberalism and secularism flowed out of the pluralistic Sikh tradition itself. That is why Ranjit Singh, on the occasion of his coronation as the Maharaja of Lahore on 12 April 1801, issued the *Nanak-shahi* coin with the inscription that attributed the bestowal of victory and power to the grace of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh's *Degh-o-Tegh-o-Fateh-Nusrat be-drang/Yaft az Nanak Guru Gobind Singh*."

In fact in the case of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the term "secularism" is not sufficient in that it has narrow connotations and implies religious insularity and aloofness which was not the characteristic of the Maharaja's policy. His praxis can be better described in terms of pluralism rather than "secularism;" the former includes the latter.

On the political level, the pluralistic Sikh tradition implies democratic, republican polity. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's secular state as such was a step towards realising a non-theocratic polity envisaged in Sikhism. That he described his *Raj* as *Sarkar Khalsa Ji* refers not to his theocratic propensity but to his desire to evolve a representative polity. But his success in this direction was only partial. It is intriguing to find that contrary to the democratic, republican polity envisioned in the Sikh doctrine and realized nebulously during the *Misl* period, Maharaja Ranjit Singh ultimately set up a monarchy on feudal lines while ascending to political power on the crest of the anti-feudal Sikh movement. The self-contradiction of the Maharaja is due to the half-realised potential of the Sikh revolution which on the ideological level contained seeds of a new civilization but which on the material plane, when it attained political power in the eighteenth century, could not create or even encourage objective conditions for a post-feudal mode of production on economic level and the corresponding super-structural forms on socio-political level.

## Cultural Significance of the Symbols on the Coins of Maharaja Ranjit Singh: Documentary Evidence of his Secularism

MADANJIT KAUR\*

The scope of numismatics study is very limited to have a clear idea about the concept of culture of a particular period. But coins furnish important data so far as the religious history is concerned.

The culture of a people, partly reflected through their belief system and religious outlook, is very much indebted to the science of numismatics, since it enables us to trace the evolution of religious movements of the related period. History of religion has two aspects, viz., socio-religious and mytho-religious. For the historian a coin can be made to throw light on the local cults, legends and myths and helps us to classify schools and periods of the art of a region. Coming to the numismatics of the Punjab, we find that the study of Sikh coins has received little attention from scholars of history.<sup>1</sup> The student of Punjab history are aware of the fact that the coinage of the Sikhs has been accorded only a passing reference and the extensive study of these has been completely overlooked.

The purpose of the present paper is to draw the attention of historians to an important source of Punjab history which has hitherto been almost ignored as a subject of historical research. The study attempts to make a survey of the various symbols inscribed on the state issues of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and to present a broad analysis of them in the context of the cultural heritage of India. The main purpose of this study is just to give some useful information on the Sikh coins so as to promote a better understanding of the religious attitude of the state and the co-existence of different religious communities in the nineteenth century Punjab.

In this paper the views expressed by me are in fact only deductions

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1. See C. J. Rodgers, 'On the Coins of the Sikhs,' *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Part-I, Vol. 50, 1881, pp. 71-93.

from an indepth enquiry of the various symbols engraved in the legends and inscriptions of the coins issued by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The present investigation is based on a variety of silver and copper coins of the Maharaja in my personal collection and in the collection of Guru Nanak Dev University Library, Amritsar. The study has been supplemented with information collected from various authoritative books on Indian coins, Vedic Text, Religion, Philosophy, Culture, Mythology and Iconography.

From the very ancient time issuing a circulating coin was a royal prerogative, which has always been exercised the moment a man sat on the throne. The coins issued by the Medieval rulers of India bear legends from religious texts, the name of the title of the king and place as well as the date of minting.<sup>2</sup> But we find a deviation from this tradition among the Sikhs, whose coins were issued not by the royalty but by military leaders in the sacred names of the Sikh Gurus. The Sikh coins did not bear the name of any chief or ruler. The Sikh chiefs held a faith that their achievement was a blessing of their Gurus and they were only its custodians and humble servants of their Masters (*Gurus*). This tradition became so deep rooted among the Sikhs that it could not be disregarded by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who was no less a powerful autocrat than any one of his time. The Maharaja followed the pattern and maintained the sacred legend,<sup>3</sup> attributing benediction of the Gurus. He named his coins as *Nanakshahis* conveying the sense of belonging to Guru Nanak.<sup>4</sup> The continuity of inscribing the names of the Sikh Gurus on the state issues of the Maharaja reflects the

2. The coins issued by the Medieval rulers bear legends on both sides, but no symbols. Generally, on the obverse of this coinage we find the *Kalima* the creed of Islam in Arabic and on the reverse the name and title of the King and place as well as the date of minting. The Sikh coins are regional limitation of the Muslim prototype in this respect. They contain legends attributed to their Gurus but no verse from their religious scriptures and no name of the ruler.
3. The coins of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his successors have the legend *Akal Sahai Guru Nanak* in varied forms. Nine types of this legend are found on the coins in our collection. Only a few of these coins contain legend in their full form and in most of the coins only a portion of the inscription and legend appears. These legends are inscribed in Persian or Gurmukhi letters. Some coins bear both Persian and Gurmukhi letters.
4. The earlier Sikh coins, issued by Banda Singh Bahadur and the *Misal* Sardars were known as *Gobindshahis* (conveying the sense of belonging to Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs).

religious favour of the Sikh rulers and their immense faith in the *Gurus*. The coinage of the Maharaja is evidence of the fact that the Sikh *Gurus* were his very deities. But a variety of Hindu religious symbols also appeared on his coins. This association of the state issues of Maharaja Ranjit Singh with the religious beliefs (of his Hindu subjects) other than his personal religion is the most striking feature of the coinage of the Sikh kingdom. The fact stands a testimony to the secularism of great Sikh ruler.

## II

Ranjit Singh conquered the city of Lahore on *Har Sudi 5, Sambat 1856 BK* (July 7, 1799 A.D.); he did not strike his first rupee till the following year. It is said that Ranjit Singh convened a big assembly of important people in April 1801. The assembly was held inside the fort of Lahore. People came from far and near to offer their greetings to the Maharaja. One of the decisions announced on this occasion was to establish a mint at Lahore. The ceremonies connected with the opening of the mint were gone through the same day and the new rupee was struck. It was presented on the following day for the Maharaja's inspection and given away in charity.<sup>5</sup> The accepted weight of the silver standard was 11 *mashas* and 2 *ratis*.<sup>6</sup> These coins did not bear the name of the Maharaja and followed the old Sikh inscription of the first Sikh coin issued by Banda Singh Bahadur in *Sambat 1767 BK* (1710 A.D.) which was followed by the Dal Khalsa also.<sup>7</sup> However, we find some modifications and additions in the legend and the design

5. S.M. Latif, *History of the Panjab* (Reprint, New Delhi, 1964), p. 353.

6. S.R. Kohli, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh* (Panjabi), Delhi, 1953, p. 53.

7. The view of the Punjab historian Rai Kanhaiya Lal, related to the orders of the Maharaja on this occasion for composing and selecting a couplet or eulogistic legend, containing the names of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, as suitable proposals for inscriptions on the state issues (*Tarikh-i-Panjab*, Urdu, p. 179) have been rejected keeping in view the fact that the distich said to have been selected had already appeared on the coins issued by Banda Singh Bahadur long ago and was regularly used by the Khalsa on their coins. In this connection, we agree with the observation of Dr Ganda Singh that, out of devotion, the Maharaja ordered that the coins of his kingdom be struck in the name of the Gurū, the real king, with the old Sikh inscriptions.

*Deg-o-Tegh-o-Fateh-o-Nursat-Bedirang, Yaft az Nanak Guru Gobind Singh*, See 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh—A Short Life Sketch,' *The Panjab Past and Present*, Vol. XIV, Part II, October 1980, p. 10.

of the coins issued by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Perhaps the first circulating coin issued by Maharaja Ranjit Singh was struck in *Sambat* 1857 (1800 A.D).<sup>8</sup> These were gold and silver rupees and were called *Nanak-shahi*. The obverse of these coins show the legends attributed to the grace of the Gurus; on the reverse is embossed the year and place of its minting.

The complete and correct reading of the inscription on these coins can be read thus :

Obverse	Reverse
<i>Shah</i>	<i>Zarab darul Saltanat Lahore</i>
<i>Nanak Wahab ast</i>	<i>Sambat 1857 (leaf symbol)</i>
<i>Fateh-i-Gobind Singh Sahib</i>	<i>Maimant Jalus Manus</i>
<i>Shah Shahan Fazal-i-Sacha</i>	
<i>Sahib ast Sikka zad barseem-o-zar<sup>9</sup></i>	

The words on the obverse means : "Lord Nanak is the granter of all boons, Victory is of Gobind Singh, the King of Kings. By the grace of the True Lord, the coin struck is in silver and gold."

The inscription on the reverse means : "struck at the seat of government, Lahore, in the auspicious *Sambat* 1857."

After these issues, coins were struck regularly every year at Lahore and Amritsar and many other places, viz., Multan, Srinagar, Dera Ghazi Khan and Peshawar. The designs, devices and inscriptions of these coins follow those of the Lahore and Amritsar mint with some modifications or additional features.

The coins of Maharaja Ranjit Singh bear a number of symbols which are most commonly met with on the reverse side of his coins, but in certain cases symbols also appear on the obverse.

8. See figures 7 and 8 in Illustration 'A', in author's article 'A Study of the Sikh Numismatics with special reference to the coins of Maharaja Ranjit Singh' in *Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Politics, Society and Economy* (ed. Fauja Singh and A.C. Arora), Punjabi University, Patiala, 1984, p. 341). Also see, C.J. Rodgers, 'On the Coins of the Sikhs,' in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Part-I, Vol. 50, 1981, Plate 1, 'Rupees of the Sikhs.'

9. This legend is found in full or portions on most of the coins struck from the Lahore mint in the subsequent period during the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his successors.

These symbols have been used in diverse designs and sizes both in silver and copper coins. Some have a design which fits the size of the coin but in very few cases is the die in the centre of the coin. Almost all the coins of the Maharaja contain symbols in their full form.

The symbols of the coins of Maharaja Ranjit Singh are religious, mythical and temporal in character and in certain cases aesthetic also. A variety of gold, silver and copper coins were issued by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. For the purpose of our study we are presenting here thirty silver coins and varieties of nine copper coins with different symbols, details of which are listed below :

#### Silver Coins

Silver rupee was the standard coin of the Maharaja. The *Nanakshahi* silver rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was widely used in circulation as it contained good weight and excellent silver. All the silver coins of Maharaja Ranjit Singh are almost of the same pattern with a variety of symbols. Legends and illustrations on these silver coins are in Persian letters. All these silver rupees are of Amritsar mint except the serial No. 4.

#### Serial No.

1. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1865 (1808 AD) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol (Guru Nanak Dev University Library, Amritsar).
2. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1866 (AD 1809) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol (Personal collection).
3. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1875 (AD 1818) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol (Guru Nanak Dev University Library, Amritsar).
4. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1876 (AD 1819) with Persian inscriptions and *matsya* (fish) and *shankha* (conchshell) symbols (Personal collection).
5. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1876 (AD 1819) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol (Guru Nanak Dev University Library, Amritsar).
6. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1877 (AD 1820) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol (Personal collection).
7. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1877 (AD 1820) with Persian inscriptions and leaf and *trisul* (in the motif of a flower) symbols (Personal collection).
8. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1878 (AD 1821)



CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SYMBOLS OF THE COINS

- with Persian inscriptions and leaf and *trisul* symbols (Personal collection).
9. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1879 (AD 1822) with Persian inscriptions and leaf and *trisul* symbols (Personal collection).
  10. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1881 (AD 1824) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol (Personal collection).
  11. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1883 (AD 1826) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol (Personal collection).
  12. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1884 (AD 1827) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol (Personal collection).
  13. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1885 (AD 1828) with Persian inscriptions and leaf and *chattar* (canopy) symbols (Guru Nanak Dev University Library, Amritsar).
  14. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1886 (AD 1829) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol. The coin bears the year of retention<sup>10</sup> *Sambat* 1884 (AD 1827) on its reverse (Guru Nanak Dev University Library, Amritsar).
  15. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1886 (AD 1829) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol (Personal collection).
  16. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1888 (AD 1831) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol (Personal collection).
  17. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1890 (AD 1833) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol. The coin bears the year of retention *Sambat* 1884 (AD 1827) on its reverse (Guru Nanak Dev University Library, Amritsar).
  18. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1890 (AD 1833) with Persian inscriptions and leaf and *trisul* symbols. The coin bears the year of retention *Sambat* 1885 (AD 1828) on its reverse (Personal collection).
  19. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1891 (AD 1834) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol. The coin bears the year of retention *Sambat* 1884 (AD 1827) on its reverse (Personal collection).
  20. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh *Sambat* 1893 (AD 1836) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol. The coin bears the year of retention *Sambat* 1884 (AD 1827) on its reverse (Personal collection).

10. See Appendix 'A'.

21. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1893 (AD 1836) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol. The coin bears the year of retention *Sambat* 1885 (AD 1828) on its reverse (Personal collection).
22. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1893 (AD 1836) with Persian inscriptions and leaf and *chattar* (umbrella or canopy) symbols. The coin also bears the term *sat* (ਸਤ), symbolic of truth and authority. Year of retention *Sambat* 1885 (AD 1828) appears on its reverse (Guru Nanak Dev University Library, Amritsar).
23. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of *Sambat* 1896 (AD 1839) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol. The coin bears the year of retention *Sambat* 1885 (AD 1828) on its reverse (Guru Nanak Dev University Library, Amritsar).
24. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of 1896 (AD 1839) with Persian inscriptions and leaf and *trisul* symbols. The coin bears the year of retention *Sambat* 1885 (AD 1828) on its reverse (Guru Nanak Dev University Library, Amritsar).
25. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Sher Singh of *Sambat* 1897 (AD 1840) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol. The coin bears the year of retention *Sambat* 1885 (AD 1828) on its reverse (Guru Nanak Dev University Library, Amritsar).
26. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Sher Singh of *Sambat* 1898 (AD 1841) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol. The coin bears the year of retention *Sambat* 1885 (AD 1828) on its reverse (Guru Nanak Dev University Library, Amritsar).
27. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Sher Singh of *Sambat* 1899 (AD 1842) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol. The coin bears the year of retention *Sambat* 1884 (AD 1827) on its reverse (Guru Nanak Dev University Library, Amritsar).
28. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Sher Singh of *Sambat* 1899 (AD 1842) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol. The coin bears the year of retention *Sambat* 1884 (AD 1827) on its reverse (Personal collection).
29. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Sher Singh of *Sambat* 1899 (AD 1842) with Persian inscriptions and leaf symbol. The coin bears the year of retention *Sambat* 1885 (AD 1828) on its reverse (Personal collection).
30. Silver Rupee of Maharaja Sher Singh of *Sambat* 1899 (AD 1842) with Persian inscriptions and leaf and full *trisul* symbols. The

coin bears the year of retention *Sambat* 1885 (AD 1828) on its reverse (Personal collection).

The coins of Maharaja Sher Singh (serial Nos. 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30) bear testimony to the fact that symbols adopted by Maharaja Ranjit Singh were followed by his successors on their state issues.

#### Copper Coins

A large number of copper coins were issued by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. These were called *Nanakshahi paisa* or *paise-i-Nanakshahi* also *pao-anna-i-Nanakshahi* (a quarter of an *anna*). The *paisa* of Maharaja Ranjit Singh varied in designs and weight. It was rated at 4 to an *anna* or 64 to rupee.

The *Sikka falus* (or copper coin) issued by Maharaja Ranjit Singh from Amritsar mint (inscribed as Ambarsar) are chiefly remarkable for their great weight and bold execution and large variety. Legends and inscriptions on these copper coins are in Gurmukhi script. The copper coins carry a variety of symbols and name of mint on them but no date. Like silver coins, the symbol of leaf is variably found on all the copper coins of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. We present here nine samples of copper coins of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Amritsar mint with varied symbols.

#### Serial No.

1. *Nanakshahi paisa* of Amritsar mint, undated with Gurmukhi inscriptions and leaf symbol.
2. *Nanakshahi paisa* of Amritsar mint, undated with Gurmukhi inscriptions and leaf and *nisan/dhavaaja* (flag) symbols.
3. *Nanakshahi paisa* of Amritsar mint, undated with Gurmukhi inscriptions and leaf and kamal (Lotus flower deciphered as Lily flower by Rodgers, symbols.
4. *Nanakshahi paisa* of Amritsar mint, undated with Gurmukhi inscriptions and leaf and *sakti* or *sri* (spear in the motif of a flower) symbols.
5. *Nanakshahi paisa* of Amritsar mint, undated with Gurmukhi inscriptions and leaf, *khadag* (sword or sabre) and flower symbols.
6. *Nanakshahi paisa* of Amritsar mint, undated with Gurmukhi inscriptions and leaf and *sakti* or *trisul* (in the motif of a flower) symbols.
7. *Nanankshahi paisa* of Amritsar mint, undated with Gurmukhi inscriptions and leaf and *trisul* symbols.
8. *Nanakshahi paisa* of Amritsar mint, undated with Gurmukhi ins-

criptions and leaf and *katār* (small sword or dagger) symbols.

Each of the above mentioned copper coin has on the obverse, the legend *Akal Sahai Guru Nanak Ji* in Gurmukhi letters with some symbols. The inscriptions on the reverse reads '*Zarab Sri Amritsar Ji*' in Gurmukhi script with the leaf symbol.

It is inferred from the survey of the symbols on the coinage of Maharaja Ranjit Singh that the favourite symbol of Maharaja was the leaf which has been identified as *pipal* leaf.<sup>11</sup> The *pipal* leaf symbol has been used for the first time in the Amritsar rupee in *Sambat* 1857 (1800 AD) and then in the form of a motif of two leaves in *Sambat* 1862 (1805 AD) and afterwards in *Sambat* 1873 (1816 AD) and then regularly. In the subsequent period some twenty three symbols (single or in combination) were engraved in the legends and inscriptions on the coins issued by the Maharaja. These symbols were also followed by his successors. Eleven types of symbols appear on the coins under study. These symbols are listed below :

1. *Pipal* leaf.
2. *Matsya* (fish).
3. *Shāṅkha* (a variety of conchshell).
4. *Trisul* (trident in a variety of motifs).
5. *Nisān/dhavaia* (flag).
6. *Chattar* (canopy/umbrella).
7. *Sat* (true).
8. *Kamal* or Lotus flower (in a variety of form).
9. *Sakti* or *Sri* (spear, in a variety of motifs).
10. *Khadag* (sword or sabre).
11. *Katar* (small sword or dagger).

#### IV

A detailed analysis of the cultural significance of the above mentioned symbols on the coins of Maharaja Ranjit Singh follows :

1. *Pipal* leaf

The *pipal* tree (*Ficus Religiosa*), in Sanskrit *asvatta*<sup>12</sup> is sacred to the Hindus as the eternal tree of life whose roots are believed to be in

11. See Foot Notes (11-35) at the end.

12. The *asvatta* is mentioned in the *Vedas*, which is believed having its roots in heaven and its branches and fruit reaching down to earth. The *asvatta* is said to have issued from Indra's skin after his limbs fell as under when Tvastr exorcized him (*Satpatha Brahmana*, tr. by Julius Eggeling, XII, 7, pp. 1-9). According to Hindu belief gods sit under the celestial *asvatta* (*Atharva Veda*,

[Continued on page 31]

the divine essence (Brahman).<sup>13</sup> The *asvatta* is also associated with spiritual knowledge. It was under the sacred branches of the *asvatta* that Buddha gained enlightenment hence it is also referred as 'Bodhi' or 'Bo' tree. Lord Krishna on the eve of his ascension to heaven is said to have meditated on the *asvatta*.<sup>14</sup>

The tree-worship has been a dominant religious belief of the primitives. In India the tree-worship has very old traditions. In fact, we find indication to the antiquity of tree worship by a depiction of third millenium BC clay tablet from Mahejodaro showing as *asvatta* tree and its worshippers.

In the Vedic period the *pipal* tree was adorned as the dwelling place of gods. Its parts were considered holy and were used in rites to drive away or overcome the enemies.<sup>15</sup> The dried wood of *asvatta* was used for making the fire sticks (*arani*) and sacrificial vessels.<sup>16</sup> Special religious ceremonies were performed under it. The *pipal* tree is still worshipped, sprinkled with water, invested with the sacred thread and circumambulated with the recitation of *mantras*. It is also associated with the healing power of nature and the fertility of the earth.

It is derived from the heritage of epic mythology of India that the *pipal* leaf was perhaps adopted as a symbol on the state issue of Maharaja Ranjit Singh for its cultural and religious antiquity.

## 2. Matsaya

The representation of *matsaya* (fish) and *shankha* (conch-shell or

*Continued from page 30]*

- v. 4.3). It is also believed that the holy men who sit in its shade are endowed with oracular powers and the capacity to remember previous births as well as with the ability to understand the language of animals. But the eating of its fruit is forbidden to all except ascetics. So powerful is this tree that we find a warning in the ancient Indian religious texts that, graves should never be placed near it (*Satpatha Brahmana*, tr. Julius Eggeling, XIII, pp. 1, 8; 16). The *pipal* tree has also medical properties. Its fruits, bark and roots when boiled and sweetened in milk are said to be powerful aphorodisiac. K.L. Bhishagratra (ed. & tr.), *Sushruta Samhita*, Benaras, 1963, Vol. II, p. 513.
13. *Katha Upanishad* Eng. tr. by Rawson Joseph Nadin, Oxford 1934, V., 'Maitri Upanishad', VI, 4.
  14. *Bhagvata Purana*, 111, 4, 3 and 8; *Brahmanda Purana*, 111, 11, 35 and 109, etc.
  15. Margaret and James Stutley, *A Dictionary of Hinduism, Its Mythology, Folklore and Development 1500 BC—AD 1500*, Pub. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1977, p. 39.
  16. F.D.K. Bosch, *The Golden Germ*, Gravenhage, 1926, p. 67 f.

sea-shell) visible on the silver coins of Maharaja Ranjit Singh are another examples of Hindu symbolism. The *matasya* (fish) is the *avatar*, (incarnation) of Vishnu.<sup>17</sup> In ordinary terms fish symbol denotes growth and rapid reproduction. The fish symbolism associated with the Sikh coinage may be treated as a sign of wish fulfilment on the part of the ruling house for its growth and continuity. The Mughal coins struck from Najibabad mint also bear fish symbol.<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Shankha

The *shakha* or sea-shell is a supplementary part of the fish symbolism on the coin of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The use of sea-shell has also a rich cultural tradition. Its mythological origin is attributed to *Yrtra* in whom all things are initially contained.<sup>19</sup> It is also believed to have been originated from *soma*; or from lightening ; or from the bones of the Gods.<sup>20</sup> From the very ancient times sea-shells have been used as ornaments. Later on these gained religious significance being used as libation vessels in performing rituals. After cutting off its point, the conch-shells were also used as a horn or trumpet in war. Its very sound was considered auspicious.<sup>21</sup> In the *Purana* it is even said to have the ability to destroy *avidya* (ignorance).<sup>22</sup>

The *shankha* is also associated with fertility. It is also an emblem

17. The primary function of the *Matasya avatar* was to save the best of mankind, other species and various precious things from the havoc of flood (See, *Matsya Puran*). We have also a Hebrew version regarding this concept of flood as the results of main decadence. Both the Indian and Hebrew traditions stem from the Sumerian Deluge story recorded on a tablet dated (1750 BC).
18. When the Sikh Sardars conquered the Jamuna Gangetic Doab and occupied Delhi, they also struck *sicca falus* (Copper coins) from Najibabad mint. Some specimens are preserved in my personal collection.
19. *Satapatha Brahmana*, Eng. tr. Julius Eggeling, Vol. 5.5.1.
20. *Atharva Veda Samhita*, Eng. tr. W. Dwight Whitney, Cambridge, 1905, Reprint Delhi, 1962, IV, 10.7.
21. Its sound is considered powerful enough to destroy demons and avert the evil eye. In most of the Hindu ceremonies the conch-shell (a form of sea-shell) is sounded in the temples and homes with belief that it drives away demons from the offerings (*Satapatha Brahmana*, Eng. tr. Julius Eggeling, V. 5.5.1). We find a parallel folk-tradition in the religious customs of the ancient Crete, where the triton-shell was sounded to summon the divinity to her shrine. The sea-shells are commonly found in the Pacific Island and are used in the local religious rituals and ceremonies. See, Levy, *Gate of Horn*, London, 1953, p. 233. In the ancient Tibet, conch-shell was blown to avert hail-storm.
22. Gopinath Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol. I, Part I, p. 295.

of Vishnu and Shiva. The conch-shell symbolism on the Sikh coins may be taken as an auspicious sign and to avert evil eye and drive the enemies.

#### 4. Trisul

The sign of *trisul* on the silver and copper coins of the Maharaja is an evidence of the Hindu impact on the Sikh coinage as well as of the revival of the Brahmanic and Shaivite cults in the third decade of the nineteenth century Punjab. The sign of *trisul*<sup>23</sup> or trident is an emblem of Lord Shiva. It denotes his three-fold-functions, viz., as creator, preserver and destroyer. According to another version found in Yoga theory : the *trisul* represents three subtle arteries of the body ; i.e., *ida*, *pingala* and *susumna*, which are believed to ascend from the base of the spinal cord to reach the summit of the head which is described as the lotus of a thousand petals.

According to one view the *trisul* is the cosmic pillar holding earth and heaven apart.<sup>24</sup>

In the early Indian numismatics and sculptural specimen the *trisul* is associated with both Vishnu and Shiva.<sup>25</sup> It is also associated with Shiva's *sakti* Durga and is regarded as a divine weapon.<sup>26</sup> The divine weapons of the gods have a place in ritual and ceremonies. It is common Hindu belief that the worship of divine weapon of gods promise, protection. Probably for this application, the *trisul* symbolism was adopted on the Sikh coins.

#### 5. Nisan or Dhavaja

This symbol is the emblem of royalty and authority. The *nisan* or *dhavaja* (flag) is commonly met on the Sikh coins. It is found on a large number of copper coins of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Mostly these coins are undated. The significance of the *dhavaja* (flag) is still obscure, though several theories have been forward to trace its origin. According to *Rigveda* the term *dhavaja* means a consecrated flag or banner or standard. The *Atharva-Veda* refers to flag with an emblem of Surya, the Sun God. Gradually the flag was regarded as a relic of the Sun emblem. The *dhavaja* was also a sign of authority. In ancient

23. Literally 'Tri' means three and *sula* means any sharp instrument, stake, dart, lance, etc.

24. It is a philosophical interpretation of this symbol.

25. J.N. Banerjee, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, p. 191.

26. J. Gonda, *Visnuism and Savism, A Comparison*, p. 178.

times each leader, great or small had his flag.<sup>27</sup> It is known from Vedic and Epic literature that a strong totemic element merged into its blazoning.<sup>28</sup> To capture a flag of opposing party in battle was, of course, a sign of victory. A simple coloured flag without a device has often been referred to as *pataka* in the Indian iconography and it implied prohibition.<sup>29</sup> Keeping in view the above cultural significance of the flag symbolism we come to the conclusion that, the symbol on the Sikh coinage represent a sign of authority.

#### 6. *Chattar*

The *chattar* (canopy, umbrella or *paiasol*) is often found on a considerable number of the silver coins of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It derived from the epic mythology of India that a king is symbolized by the umbrella, which is believed to take on the aura of regal authority and power.<sup>30</sup> According to *Agni Purana* the white parasol symbolized royal or delegated power and the *mantras* with which it is consecrated ensure victory.<sup>31</sup> The representation of *Chattar* on the coins of Maharaja Ranjit Singh is another example of secular symbolism.

#### 7. *Sat*

*Sat* is a traditional Indian symbol with great spiritual ramification. In Indian philosophy *sat* is the symbol of 'Divine Being'/Supreme Reality/Truth. In Ontology it means 'existing being,' in Ethics 'good' and in Epistemology 'true.' In general terms it stands for purity and truth. Obviously, the symbol of *sat* on the state issues of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was adopted as a sign of purity and authority. The usage of *sat* symbolism on the coins of Mahararaja Ranjit Singh is an evidence of his concern for temporal as well as spiritual values.

#### 8. *Kamal* (Lotus)-

The symbol of *kamal* or *kamala* (Lotus flower) appears on the silver

27. Benjamin Walker, *Hindu World, An Encyclopedic Survey of Hinduism*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1968, Vol. I, p. 361.

28. *Ibid.*

29. In Mauryan times liquor could only be sold with permission of the King and when this was granted the seller used to hang out a special flag to indicate his licenced status (*Ibid.*).

30. Benjamin Walker, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 472.

31. Margaret and James Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 62.



and copper coins of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in a variety of flower motif. *kamal* is a traditional Indian symbol. It stands for purity and is regarded as the national flower of India. In Hindu mythology, *Kamal* personifies goddess Lakshmi.<sup>32</sup> It is also identified with the mythical tenth *mahavidya*, the lotus girl who "appears as pure consciousness of self bathed by the calm water of fulfilment.....she is enjoyer and enjoyed the state of reconstituted unity." She also rules over the auspicious sign Taurus (Rohini).<sup>33</sup> Obviously the symbol of *kamal* on the state issues of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was adopted as an auspicious sign of good fortune and purity.

#### 9. Sakti or Sri

The symbol of *sakti* (spear) is also found on the coins of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Spear is the symbol of Divine power or energy and is personified as female deity in the Hindu mythology. In philosophical terms *sakti* conveyed the idea of an energy by which a man might ritually come into contact with the divine.<sup>34</sup> The idea of *sakti* as the personification of energy finds a prominent place in Shaivite ideology which owed its origin and growth basically to indigenous and matriarchal tradition. The notion of *sakti* also figures prominently in the Tantric traditions but with a variation.<sup>35</sup> Gradually various local *Devi* cults became assimilated into the main current of *sakti* mythology. Consequently a number of goddesses like Parvati, Uma, Ambika and Durga, Kali and Chamunda whose origin lacks any apparent relation with the energy principal, became important representatives of the *sakti*. Spear had been an important weapon of ancient warfare. It has been worshipped by soldiers and tribal people as a symbol of power. The *sakti* symbolism on the Sikh coinage is an indication of

32. In the Vedas the term 'Lakshmi' occurs in the sense of auspicious, and is also applied to a fortunate women. In the earlier legends, Lakshmi is the goddess of good fortune and beauty. In the latter legends she is spoken of as the spouse of Vishnu. Lakshmi is also known as goddess of fortune and Padmavati or *kamal* (lotus). See Benjamin Walker, Vol. I, p. 584.

33. Margaret and James Stutley, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

34. J. Gonda, *Vishnuism and Saivism*, London, 1970, pp. 55-61.

35. According to Tantric tradition the active function of this energy is assigned to Shiva and the inactive function to *sakti* (its female personification), see, A. Bharati, *Tantric Traditions*, London, 1965, p. 213.

the popularity of Shaivite cult in the contemporary Punjab. The appearance of Hindu symbolism on the Sikh coinage became more predominant under the successors of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

#### 10. *Khadag*

The symbol of sword or sabre (*khadag*) is also there on the coins of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. *khadag* is a traditional Indian symbol. It is an emblem of the ruling class (the Kashatriyas) and a weapon of war. Sword is a symbol of valour, strength and power of knowledge to destroy ignorance and injustice. We have the symbol of *khadag* on the coins of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in a variety of motifs.

#### 11. *Katar*

The symbol of *katar* (small sword or dagger) is also depicted on the state issues of the Maharaja. It is seen more on the copper coins than the silver rupees. *Katar* is a sign of power and royalty. This symbol is found in many of the indigenous coins.

Some Sikh coins have a device of a number of dots, circles, decorative signs, etc. The precise meaning of which it is difficult to discover. The execution of these symbols is generally very crude and it is difficult to discern exactly the design and meaning of these symbols.

#### Conclusions

The Sikh coins under study furnish us with a definite information on the Socio-Cultural History of the Punjab under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Some significant conclusions derived from our investigation are given below :

1. Like other Sikh coins, the state issues of Maharaja Ranjit Singh do not carry the name or the effigies of the ruler. His coins were struck in the sacred names of the Sikh Gurus and they carry legends attributed to the benediction of the Gurus with a variety of signs and symbols. The legends, devices and symbols of these coins are religious in character. However, majority of the symbols selected for the state issues of Maharaja Ranjit Singh were adopted for their cultural and religious antiquity. Therefore, symbolism on the coins of the Maharaja represents his true concern for temporal as well as spiritual values.

2. The usage of symbols as an essential feature of the Sikh coinage (in the Majha region of the Punjab) was introduced during

the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. This tradition was carried out by his successors. The coinage of Maharaja Ranjit Singh bears a number of symbols, which are most commonly met with on the reverse side of the coins but in certain cases symbols appears on both sides of the coin. These symbols have been used in different designs and sizes and are found on gold, silver and copper coins issued by the Maharaja. A few more symbols were introduced by the successors of the Maharaja. On the whole some two dozen types of symbols, singly or in combination were engraved in the legends and inscriptions on the coinage of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. However, the *pipal* leaf symbol remained predominant.

3. These coins can be considered as rare and unique visual source of the history of Maharaja Ranjit Singh as well as the dynamics of the religious attitude and belief system of the nineteenth century Punjabi society. The presence of Hindu symbols on these coins reveal on the one hand that Maharaja Ranjit Singh was not averse to borrowing features of old Indian traditions if it suited his purpose, and on the other, that the legends entirely attributed to the benediction of the Sikh Gurus show how conscious the Maharaja was in the preservation of the old Sikh coinage tradition introduced by Banda Singh Bahadur. Therefore, the coins of Maharaja Ranjit Singh bear testimony to the eclectic religion of the ruler as well as mytho-religion of his times. The presence of such a situation is an indication of the need of revising our opinion on the personal religion and the state religion of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and as well as the true nature of the *Khalsa Panth* during the period of the Maharaja.

4. The present study of the Sikh coins also prove useful in tracing the development of the religious movements of the nineteenth century Punjab. The adoption of Hindu symbols on the Sikh coinage bear evidence to the fact that the favourite divinities of the Hindu pantheon were worshipped by the Sikh royalty with equal devotion. The adoption of Hindu symbolism on the Sikh coinage is an indication of the religious beliefs behind faith and superstitions of the contemporary Punjabi society as well as an evidence on the tendency of nineteenth century Sikhs to conform to Hindu traditions and usages.

5. In the history of the nineteenth century Punjab, the most important socio-religious phenomenon was the revival of the Vaishnavite, Shaivite and *Sakti* cults. The impact of Hindu revivalism of the nineteenth century Punjab found proper representation on the coins

of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Therefore, the Sikh coins under study bear testimony to the secular attitude of the ruler as well as the cultural level of the nineteenth century Punjabi society.

6. The structural form of the state issues of Maharaja Ranjit Singh had an impact on the subsequent coinage of the Punjab region. The symbols of these Sikh coins were followed by the Dogras of Jammu, when they established their independent kingdom with the support of the British after the sunset of the Sikh kingdom of Lahore.

7. The most significant conclusion drawn from the present study is that these coins can be taken as cultural index to the history of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his times. Where as the Maharaja retained old Sikh traditions in his coinage, he also introduced symbols associated with the Hindu beliefs on his state issues. Besides the Gurmukhi script the Maharaja made use of Persian letters ; the language of the Muslims for the legends and inscriptions on his coinage. All these facts bear testimony to the secularism of the Maharaja and the atmosphere of religious tolerance, presence of communal harmony and peaceful co-existence of different religious communities in the nineteenth century Punjabi society.

#### APPENDIX 'A'

It is inferred from the present study that rupees were minted regularly on the general pattern with the date of issue upto *Sambat* 1884, and *Sambat* 1885. The coins struck after that bore the same *Sambats* for the next twelve years, until 1896 BK. The reason for the retention of the years *Sambats* 1884 and 1885 on all these coins is not precisely known. One view is that the Maharaja did so under the influence of a superstition. Another probability, which seems to be more plausible, is that it was done to put an end to the malpractice the money changers had introduced, that of levying an arbitrary rate of discount on rupees of previous dates without reference to diminution of weight by wear.

We find a similar example, though of a slightly different nature, in the case of coins of Emperor Shah Alam struck from Murshidabad retaining the 19th year of his reign (1773 AD). Actually these rupees were struck by the East India Company in (1773 AD) when a great variety of currencies bearing the name of Shah Alam were suppressed in the territories subject to the Company. These rupees were called the sicca rupees. The unvarying date (in the 19th year) remained unaltered in order to put a stop to a practice which the money-changers

had introduced of levying an arbitrary rate of discount on rupees of previous dates, without reference to any actual diminution of weight by wear. On these coins the place of coinage remained always nominally the same, whether the coin was actually struck at Murshidabad, Dacca or Calcutta. See, H.H. Wilson, *A Glossary of the Judicial and Revenue Terms* (Reprint Delhi, 1968), p. 447.

## APPENDIX 'B'

The Amritsar rupees from *Sambat* 1861 BK show a new sign, 'a double branch' which has been supposed to represent a peacock tail (see figures 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17, Illustrations 'A' Rodgers' article 'on the coins of the Sikhs' in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. 50, part I, 1881). All these seven coins carry this symbol with little variations. On one of these coins (figure 17, illustrations 'A'), there is an ornamental figure deciphered by scholar as that of an *arsi* (thumb mirror) worn by the women of the Punjab. The dates of these seven coins are *Sambats* 1860-1866 BK (1803-1809 AD), the period in which Bibi Moran, the favourite Muslim wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, was exercising a considerable influence over the Maharaja. It is said that once she had a wager, like Empress Nur Jahan, that she would get her name engraved on the state coins. According to Cunningham, *A History of the Sikhs*, S. Chand & Co., Delhi, 1966, p. 159. Moran obtained a great ascendancy over the Maharaja and persuaded him to commemorate their love by striking a coin in her name (AD 1811). But she only succeeded partially in her aim, because instead of her name, a mark only in the shape of a tail of *Mor/Mayur* (peacock), was allowed to be imprinted on the silver rupees. They were called *Moranshahi* rupees as distinguished from the *Nanakshahi* rupees and remained current till *Sambat* 1884 (1827 AD). There is another probability also; the peacock is also an emblem of Durga, the goddess of *Shakti* (power). The peacock coins may as well be taken as referring to an ancient Hindu deity Kartikya, the god of war, whose vehicle was *Sikhivahiana* (the peacock). This symbol is found on the ancient Indian coins of the Kushana Emperors Huvishka and Kumar Gupta. Therefore, it is possible that the legend of Moran is not correct and may be a later fabrication of a section of people who were antagonized with the Maharaja for his association with a Muslim courtesan.

The *Moranshahi* coins are the same as those of the Sikh rupees struck at Amritsar in *Sambat* 1897 BK (fig. 7, Illustrations 'A') in *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. 50, Part I, 1881).

## The Dynamics of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Policies

GURBACHAN SINGH NAYYAR\*

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was an astute statesman who adopted well conceived policies in various spheres. This paper aims at examining some of the religious and economic aspects of the dynamics of his policies.

The secular character of Ranjit Singh's government is often stressed by the historians and writers of the Maharaja. Before we examine this aspect of his rule, it is essential to clarify its connotation. The word secular connotes something concerned with the affairs of this world (ਸੰਸਾਰਕ, ਗੈਰਮਜ਼ਹੂਬੀ ਅਸੰਪ੍ਰਦਾਇਕ). In American concept, secularism stands for having no concern between the State and religion at all. Albeit, in India religious traditions having become part and parcel of the society, the word is taken to mean equal respect to all the religions and absence of any State religion. In the case of Ranjit Singh, the term secularism having narrow connotations does not seem to be much appropriate.

As a matter of fact, Ranjit Singh was a product of Punjabi culture and Sikh religious traditions. Thus, one of the major factors which shaped his personality was the cultural background which he inherited. This takes us to define the features of the culture he acquired. Albeit, before tracing the roots of Punjabi culture and the impact of Sikh tradition on Ranjit Singh there is a need to stress one significant factor which carries weight if we are to assess some of the aspects pertaining to the state policies of the Maharaja. It was the diplomatic awareness of the Maharaja who was wise enough to consider that it was very essential and expedient to conciliate the different communities living in the Punjab especially the religious classes and the landed aristocracy. Hence the State resorted to adopt liberal policies towards the sister communities but the fact remains that the Punjabi culture and the Sikh tradition yielded tremendous effect upon the State policies of the Maharaja.

In fact the very birth of the Punjabi culture took place with the birth of the people of the Punjab and is older than the name 'Punjab'

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itself. Nevertheless, the Punjabi culture is much older than the Punjabi language. The intermingling of the blood and languages of the successive hordes of immigrants which included the Greeks, Sythians, Kushans, Hunas, Pathans, Turks, Mughals, etc., gave birth to Punjabi culture.

In the early centuries of the medieval period, Punjabi language passed through several phases of its origin and modification which was added to the Punjabi culture which as a common medium of speech and popular literature brought the diversity lying in different sections of the population of the region closer together and by the time of political ascendancy of Ranjit Singh, Punjabi culture was deeply rooted in the society. It was projecting itself in the shape of freedom from certain taboos, open-mindedness, liberality, etc. Ranjit Singh acquired these cultural ethos from his social and political environs and from his family background itself. The way he administered his subjects belonging to different sections and the way he conducted himself in the given conditions of work explain the extent of the influence of Punjabi culture and the Sikh tradition on him. Moreover, the Punjabi cultural traditions and the Sikh religious traditions ran complementary to each other in the case of Ranjit Singh and his predecessors.

Of course, the Maharaja professed Sikh religion and was a devout Sikh. He commenced his daily routine work with listening to the recitation from *Guru Granth Sahib*. Owing to his deep regard for Sikhism he called himself *Ranjit Nagara*. He arranged *Ardasa* while launching any new undertaking. So unflinching was his faith on *gurbani* that he never took any vital decision without its guidance. He paid his *nazar* by way of *shukrana* at *Harimandir Sahib*, Amritsar and other religious places after attaining success in important campaigns. Recitation from *Guru Granth Sahib* was a must at the time of solving problems faced by the State and practical measures were taken thereof. He gave charity to the religious endowments to his heart's content. He provided gold plates for the towers of the *Harimandir*. He also got built four storeys of the *Akal Takhat* founded by Guru Hargobind in 1606. He also got built some storeys of the lofty building of Baba Atal at Amritsar. The words engraved on the main gate of the *Harimandir Sahib* that the Guru himself was kind enough to get service from his devotee (Ranjit Singh) bear testimony to his fondness for Sikhism. He used Amritsar as his summer capital and decorated it with gardens. A mint of *Nanak Shahi* coins was also

founded at Amritsar. These coins bore words from the Persian inscription inscribed on the coins of Banda Bahadur which referred to the Gurus Nanak and Gobind Singh as the bestowers of sovereignty. His official seal bears the words *Akal Sahai* the helper of Ranjit.

The liberal character of the Sikh faith had immense impact upon the Maharaja. It was this spirit enunciated in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus that made the Maharaja to show tolerance and liberalism to other communities. He created an atmosphere of reconciliation and the so called secularism. The officials of his government belonged to different faiths. Merit was the only consideration before the Maharaja for their selection. Illahi Bakhsh was the in charge of artillery of the *Fauj-i-Khas*. Aziz-ud-Din is remembered even to this day as the 'mouth piece of his master.' Faqir Nur-ud-Din and Imam-ud-Din enjoyed conspicuous status and honour in his Court. Similarly, the Hindu Diwan Ganga Ram, Diwan Moti Ram, Diwan Bhiwani Das, Diwan Dina Nath, etc., etc., were administrators of great worth. Lepel Griffin writes in this connection that though the prominent generals of Ranjit Singh were Sikhs yet he had unflinching confidence on the Brahmans, Rajputs and the Muslims. As the Maharaja envisaged the policy of respecting all the religions, he distributed lot of money to Hindu temples and Muslim places of worship. The Maharaja, in fact, crushed rigid religious plans and schemes. He condemned religious fanaticism and the fact remains that the cultural heritage and the Sikh religious tradition played a laudable role in the formation of his ideas. We agree with Waheed-ud-Din when he states "The Maharaja on a few occasions was even present at Id-ul-Fitr, although that is a strictly religious festival, and during Muharram young princes used to make offerings just as if they had been Muslims. Ranjit Singh's Hindu, Muslim and Sikh subjects equally reciprocated his warm interest in their religions by remembering him in their prayers on important occasions—when he launched a new campaign, when he won a new victory, when he had a hair-breadth escape, when he was ill or recovered from illness and finally during his last illness and death and funeral."<sup>1</sup>

In a nut shell, Ranjit Singh's policies of recruitment of the staff for civil and military duties, his policies with regard to trade and industry were all based on the spirit of liberalism. Faqir Waheed-ud-Din

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1. Faqir Waheed-ud-Din, *The Real Ranjit Singh* New Delhi, 1976, p. 23.



is right when he comments that 'there was in fact no formal protocol but only a simple set of practical conventions which grew in course of time,' and his standing orders were that if any wrong order was issued by him which was against the general welfare of the people that should be immediately reported to him for amendment.<sup>2</sup> The system of administration under Maharaja Ranjit Singh was simple like that of other Sikh rulers and admirably suited to the needs of the time. It was most congenial to the temperament of the people.<sup>3</sup> The mode of administration was affected by several factors namely, absence of a written system of laws, dependence upon customary usage, concentration of alround powers in the same official, the latter's personal temperament, the bearing of the locality and the Maharaja's own personal influence. Charity was the custom of the day throughout India and Ranjit Singh, who was free from religious prejudices was not an exception. He gave charity to persons of all the religions, namely, Hindus, Christians, Muslims and Sikhs. The Maharaja granted huge sums of money to the Akalis in charity in the shape of hard cash, silver ducats, horses, cows, etc.<sup>4</sup> He contributed money in charity to different holy places like *Harimandir*, *Akal Bunga*, *Jhanda Bunga* and other *bungas*.<sup>5</sup> He also gave liberal charity to Hindu places of worship including Jawalamukhi. He also distributed charity liberally to mosques and Muslim *faqirs* of repute like Rahman and Mastan Shah.<sup>6</sup>

It is quite in the fitness of things if we probe into certain aspects of the economic policies which the Maharaja adopted and pursued in respect of industry and trade. The interest of the Maharaja in the development of trade and industry was two fold. First, he was interested in those industries which could assist him in meeting the requirements of the State administration, namely, arms and ammunition and second, it was his benevolent interest in the welfare of his subjects which prompted him to formulate policies in this respect.

The government of Maharaja took great care to manufacture weapons and other material of military importance as it was required by the exigency of time. Defence industries were thus, a State enterprise. It was started with the establishment of a workshop in the

2. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

3. Cf. Malcolm, Lt.-Col., *Sketch of the Sikhs*, London, 1812, p. 127.

4. Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Twarikh*, Daftar III, Part I, Lahore, 1885, pp. 450, 478.

5. *Ibid.*, part V, p. 68.

6. *Ibid.*, part IV, p. 550.

*Idgah* of Lahore. In course of time workshops for manufacturing arms were set up at Nakodar, Shahdara, Pishawar, etc.<sup>7</sup> The workshop at Nakodar was supervised by Khalifa Noor-ud-Din. Whereas the workshop at Shahdara was controlled by one Subha Singh under the management of Jawahar Mal Daroga. General Court was the in charge of the workshop situated at *Idgah*, Lahore.<sup>8</sup> Faqir Noor-ud-Din was the over all in charge of the State workshop who was responsible for their smooth working. Technicians were appointed by the in charge of the workshop assisted by the superintendent. Painters, carpenters, blacksmiths, armourers, turners, etc., were appointed to assist the workshop *Daroga*. These workshops manufactured cannons, matchlocks, carbines, guns (heavy and small), pistols, small firearms, steel caps, helmets, daggers, spears, lances, etc. The State manufactured all types of ammunition powder required for arms.<sup>9</sup> The chief manufacturing towns were Amritsar, Shujahbad and Multan.

The art of manufacturing weapons of war was fairly advanced in the early 19th century. Most of the fighting material used by the forces of the Maharaja was cast in his own founderies and could be prepared favourably with the British material of warfare.

Boat manufacturing is another item to be mentioned there. River-ferries were under the control of the State. The State itself appointed boatmen for military convenience. The boats were also got built at Pind Dadan Khan, Attock, etc. In the later years of his reign, the Maharaja commissioned General Ventura to get ready a paddle boat for him. A sum of rupees forty thousands were sanctioned for this purpose.

The State also controlled several salt mines. Ganesh Das Wadhra mentions that Judi Hill in the region of Shamsabad had five good salt mines. Another salt mine worth mentioning here is that of Khoshab. Salt was taken out from various places in Peshawar region. Maharaja Ranjit Singh appointed French traveller Jacquemont for improving the output of the salt mines.<sup>10</sup>

Iron mines were also owned by the State. Those were located in

7. Prem Singh Hoti (Ed. Fauja Singh), *Punjab Da Samajik Itihas* (Punjabi), Patiala, 1979, pp. 54, 56, 57.

8. Secret Proceedings, March, 23, 1844 (N.A.I.).

9. Steinbach, *The Punjab*, Patiala, 1970, reprint, p. 50.

10. Garrett, *The Punjab a Hundred Years Ago*, p. 47.

the Kangra region, Mandi, Suket, Bannu, Bhimber and Jammu.<sup>11</sup> English writers writing on Maharaja Ranjit Singh have exaggerated the mineral wealth of the Punjab and have undermined the achievements of the State government.

Whereas the State owned the above mentioned industries, private entrepreneurs were also encouraged in the fields other than mentioned above. Prominent private industries produced cotton, silver, woolen textiles, leather, wooden goods, utensils, ornaments and paper manufacturing. Amritsar, Lahore, Multan and Sri Nagar were the major industrial centres. Jalandhar, Batala, Hoshiarpur, Wazirabad, Dera Gazi Khan and Peshawar were also known for industries.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh extended considerable assistance to the private industries. The government made major purchases from the private concerns to meet the requirements of the Royal Court and the army. Taxes were levied at moderate rates. Small craftsmen paid nominal taxes.<sup>12</sup> Trade within the Punjab was greatly encouraged by the conditions of peace and stability maintained by the government of the Maharaja. Usually every town was linked with its hinter-land and served as a good market. The State helped internal and external trades in various ways. The State was the major customer of the imported and exported goods and consumed those goods in military and civil establishments.

The Maharaja gave impetus to urban development by encouraging trade and industry. Several small towns were changed into big cities.<sup>13</sup> Whereas the Maharaja promoted trade and industry in the towns and the cities of the Punjab, the conditions of the general prosperity of the Punjab also improved. Steinbach also makes mention of the internal prosperity of the Punjab.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, we see that Maharaja Ranjit Singh envisaged policies and plans quite befitting to the prevailing conditions which benefited all the sections of the society irrespective of caste, creed and religious professings.

11. Ali-ud-Din Mufti, *Ibrat Namah*, Lahore, 1961, pp. 46-47.

12. *Maharaja Ranjit Singh First Death Centenary Memorial Volume*, Patiala, 1970, reprint, pp. 137-128.

13. Ali-ud-Din Mufti, *op.cit.*, pp. 80-100.

14. *Ibid.*, 55.

## Some Contemporary Sources of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Reign

JAGJIVAN MOHAN WALIA\*

The court language of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was Persian and this was the main reason why the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs acquired proficiency in Persian. All the Khalsa Durbar Records of the Maharaja's reign are in Persian in *shikasta* form of writing. The correspondence of the Durbar with the British and other foreign and native States was also conducted in Persian. Persian had been the court language from the very beginning and it was of the high standard. Besides these records, the contemporary writers wrote their books in this language recording the history of the Sikhs and the achievements of the great Maharaja. Some outstanding Persian works are a perennial source of information on the history of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's period.

### (i) *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*

*Umdat-ut-Tawarikh* by Sohan Lal Suri is the most comprehensive history of the Sikhs dealing with the period from Guru Nanak till the annexation of the Punjab by the British in 1849 A.D. It was published at Lahore in 1885. Sohan Lal Suri was the official *Akhbar Nawis* (chronicler) at the Maharaja's court and that of his successors. He served the Maharaja for twenty seven years. Charhat Singh and Mahan Singh, the grand-father and father of the Maharaja commissioned Lala Ganpat Rai, the father of Sohan Lal Suri to record the events of their period. Sohan Lal prefixed his chronicle the account recorded by his father.

The chronicle comprised five daftars, each of which is sub divided into parts. The details are as under :

Daftar-I—From Guru Nanak, 1526 B.K. (1469 A.D.) to the reign of Ahmad Shah Durrani, 1828 B.K. (1771 A.D.).

Appendix—A brief account of some Sikh courtiers written by the author after the Anglo-Sikh Wars.

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\*Punjab State Archives, Patiala.

Daftar II—From Sardars Charhat Singh and Mahan Singh to the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, 1887 B.K. corresponding to 1830 A.D.

Supplement to Daftars I and II—A brief account of Guru Nanak and other nine Gurus, the important Sikh *misl*s, viz., Bhangis, Faizulapuria, Ramgarhia, Kanahya, Ahluwalia and Sukerchakya and how they were annexed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh upto 1881 B.K. (1825 A.D.). Daftar III, Part i—A record of the events of the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh during 1888 B.K. (1831 A.D.).

Part ii—The chronicle of the Maharaja's reign to 1892 B.K. (1835 A.D.).

Part iii—The chronicle of the reign to 1893 B.K. (1836 A.D.).

Part iv—Chronicle upto 1895 B.K. (1838 A.D.).

Part v—History continued from the birth of Kanwar Dalip Singh to 1896 B.K. (1839 A.D.). In it, there is a description of the meetings of Lord Auckland at Ferozepore, Amritsar and Lahore, the Tripartite Treaty with Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk and the British Government and the assistance of the Maharaja in the First Anglo-Afghan War till his death.

Daftar IV—Part i—From 1895 B.K. (1839 A.D.) to 1902 B.K. (1845 A.D.), a chronicle of the reigns of Maharaja Kharak Singh, regency of Kanwar Naunihal Singh, Maharani Chand Kaur, Maharaja Sher Singh, Maharaja Dalip Singh and the fall of the kingdom of Punjab.

Part ii—An account of Maharaja Sher Singh.

Part iii—An account of Maharaja Dalip Singh. The original narrative of the Anglo-Sikh War is not found. The account of the Anglo-Sikh War was presented to Sir Herbert Edwards at the time of the author's meeting with him, but was not returned afterwards.

Daftar V—The annexation of the Punjab from 1902 B.K. (1845 A.D.) to 1907 B.K. (1849 A.D.).

The style of the author is ornate with a display of erudition and he cited poetic quotations frequently. The construction of sentences is often complicated and rhetoric. As a court chronicler, he eulogised the Maharaja. In the earlier portion of Daftars I and II, he introduced lengthy philosophical disquisitions at the commencement of each chapter. The author has used many Hindi and Punjabi words.

As he used to be present in the court, he had direct knowledge of the event which he recorded. The news writers from the provinces sent the reports which formed the basis of this chronicle. Except Volume I and the portion of the Volume II, which were written on the basis of information recorded by the author's father or secondary

sources the chronicle is contemporary. The author commenced the writing of the book in 1813 A.D., since that year, the whole work is contemporary and most authentic. For writing the history of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his successors, the value of this chronicle is immense.

*Umdat-ut-Tawarikh* is the most comprehensive and authentic history of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, his predecessors and successors. The value of the work was recognised by the Maharaja who rewarded the author for this meritorious service. Captain Wade's opinion of the work is recorded on the flying cover of the copy which was presented to him and is now available in the Royal Asiatic Society Library :

"As a record of the dates and a chronicle of events tested by a minute comparison with other authorities and my own personal investigation into its accuracy during my 17 years' residence among the Sikhs, I am able to pronounce it in those two respects as a true and faithful narrative of Ranjit Singh's eventful life."

In the 'Foreward' to the translation of Daftar III of *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Prof. Sita Ram Kohli writes, "Sohan Lal's *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh* comes next only to the unpublished records of the Khalsa Government (which are still intact in the Archives of the Punjab State), and may be said to furnish the primary material for the study of the history of the Punjab during the first half of the nineteenth century."<sup>1</sup> In fact, no other book on the history of Maharaja Ranjit Singh deals so comprehensively with his reign.

#### (ii) *Zafarnama-i-Ranjit Singh*

Dewan Amar Nath, son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Finance Minister Diwan Dina Nath wrote this book. While writing the account of the year 1889 Bik., (1832 A.D.) the Diwan writes that he was commissioned by the Maharaja to write the book. In the dedicatory poem at the end of the book, the author writes that the manuscript was written during the years 132-36 A.D.

*Zafarnama-i-Ranjit Singh* was edited by Sita Ram Kohli and published by the Punjab University, Lahore in 1928.

The chronicle is mostly contemporary and in most case he gives the eye-witness accounts. Even in that part of the chronicle which pertains to the period before the year when he was enjoined upon by the Maharaja to write the book, the writer verified the events from

1. V. S. Suri (tr.), *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Daftar III, S. Chand & Co., New Delhi, 1961, p. v.

official sources or from participants in the events who were alive at the time of writing. He writes, "All these matters have been described after careful inquiries by the author himself from elderly people and his contemporaries."<sup>2</sup>

The style is ornate and the author manifests in prose and verse a remarkable command of Persian. The *Quran* and *Hadis* are often quoted in the book. He has added a formal introduction at the beginning of each chapter. The author has modelled history upon Abul Fazal's *Akbarnama*.

Dewan Amar Nath was a direct descendant of Bakhat Mal and Dewan Dina Nath and was a great scholar, he received many rewards from the Maharaja. He was enjoined upon by the Maharaja to write his memoirs.<sup>3</sup> Later he served as the Bakhshi or paymaster of the irregular cavalry.<sup>4</sup> But due to certain unknown reasons, he could not remain long at the court and thus could not continue his work after 1836-37.

Due to his association with the Khalsa Durbar through his father and as a noble, he had special facilities to collect material from the state records or from eminent persons. The narrative is thus authentic. The Chapters II to XI pertain to the period of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and historically form the most important part of the book. As an authentic and comprehensive account of the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, its value is immense and it is next in importance to the official chronicle of Sohan Lal Suri, i.e., *Udmat-ut-Tawarikh*.

### (iii) *Tarikh-i-Punjab*

Ghulam Muhayy-ud-Din alias Bute Shah of Ludhiana is the author of comprehensive *Tarikh-i-Punjab*. He was enjoined upon by George Russel Clark, agent to the Governor-General, who assumed charge of the office from Lieut. Col. Wade in 1840 A.D. The author completed the *Tarikh* between 1840 and 1842 A.D. [ ? 1848 ]

The style of the author is simple, direct and lucid. The account in Daftars I, II and III is based on secondary sources. Daftar IV which pertains to the *misls* which assumed power as a result of the disinteg-

2. Sita Ram Kohli (ed.), *Zafarnama-i-Ranjit Singh*, Punjab University, Lahore, 1928, p. VIII.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

4. *Ibid.*, p. VI.

ration of the Mughal empire is based on earlier sources. Daftar V relating to the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh forms about one half of the whole volume. It is a detailed chronicle of the rise, growth and consolidation of Ranjit Singh's dominions in the Punjab and the adjacent territories. The author has not mentioned about his source of information. His account is contemporary. He was in the service in the British Agency at Ludhiana. He utilized the British records as he wrote the work at the instance of the British Political Agent at Ludhiana. Butè Shah's account of the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was considered authentic by such great authorities as Captains Murray and Wade. J.D. (Cunningham writes, "Capt. Murray, the political agent at Ambala and Capt. Wade, the political agent at Ludhiana, each wrote a narrative of the life of Ranjit Singh. The two narratives in question were, indeed, mainly prepared from accounts drawn up by intelligent Indians at the requisition of the English functionaries, and of those the chronicle of Bute Shah, a Muhammadan and Sohan Lal, a Hindu, are the best known and may be had for purchase."<sup>5</sup>

It is certain that Bute Shah visited the court of the Maharaja with a British delegation and was rewarded by the latter, Sohan Lal Suri mentions about Bute Shah in the *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Daftar III.

"Bute Shah visited the Sarkar along with Munshi Shahamat Ali and was awarded Rs. 100 and trays of sweets."<sup>6</sup>

"Bute Shah visited the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh along with Rai Gobind Jas and Munshi Shahamat Ali and had a talk with the Sarkar about the cis-Sutlej country."<sup>7</sup>

"Rai Gobind Jas, Munshi Shahamat Ali and Bute Shah interviewed the Sarkar in the company of Aziz-ud-Din. Bute Shah was granted Rs. 100 and seven garments as parting gifts."<sup>8</sup>

He visited the court of the Maharaja in 1837 A.D. Bute Shah's account of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in Daftar V resembles closely with that of Sohan Lal in Daftars II and III of *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*. Both the accounts commence with Budh Singh or Budha Singh as in *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, the great grandfather of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The same order of narration is followed by both, but the account of Bute Shah is

5. J.D. Cunningham, *A History of the Sikhs*, rep. Delhi, 1966, p. 426.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, p. 430.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 432.



very brief. The resemblance in text and substance is so close that one feels that Bute Shah's *Tarikh-i-Punjab* is not more than intelligent summary of *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh* at some places, the text of both the chronicles is the same.

There is variation in the two narratives. Sohan Lal, being the court chronicler, tactfully describes the early career of the Maharaja and his ancestors, but Bute Shah uses blunt language.

As he was the eye-witness, Sohan Lal Suri gives details. On the other hand, Bute Shah has only recorded the conspicuous events, omits details of secondary events and narrates the events in a connected historical manner. As Bute Shah had contact with the British functionaries at Ludhiana, he uses English names correctly and gives Christian years and sometimes months and dates corresponding to Bikrama era.

The historical value of *Tarikh-i-Punjab* is immense. While recording the history of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, he utilised British sources to corroborate many points.

#### (iv) *Ibratnama*

Ali-ud-Din Mufti son of Mufti Khair-ud-Din of Lahore completed this manuscript on 13th September 1864. It was edited by Dr Mohammad Baqir and published by the Punjabi Adabi Academy, Lahore in 1961.

The work was dedicated to Charles Raikes, Commissioner and Superintendent, Lahore. The author records that the oppression of the Sikhs, forced him to leave his ancestral home at Lahore and take shelter at Ludhiana with his family in 1824. From that year till that day, 1864, he served the British Government at different places in the Punjab, on the frontier and even at Kabul and upto the borders of Ghazni and Bamian. With a view to leave a memorial behind and egged on by Mr. Charles Raikes, he resolved to complete a history of the Sikhs which was commenced by his father at the instance of Col. C.M. Wade, political agent at Ludhiana.<sup>9</sup>

The style of the author is simple. The language is florid but easy. There is no lengthy dedicatory passage in it.

The author and his father, who had originally planned the book lived during the greater part of the Sikh rule in the Punjab and thus account in the book is based on personal knowledge. The earlier por-

9. Ali-ud-Din, *Ibratnama*, Vol. II, Punjabi Adabi Academy, Lahore, 1961, p. 1.

tions pertaining to the physical features of the Punjab and its early history upto the rise of Ranjit Singh are based on secondary sources. Besides history, the author has written about the manners and customs of the people.

(v) **Char Bagh-i-Punjab**

Ganesh Das Bادهhra completed this manuscript in 1854. It was edited by Prof. Kirpal Singh and published by the Sikh History Research Department, Khalsa College, Amritsar in 1965.

It is history of the Punjab from the ancient times to 1849 A.D. Beginning with the solar and lunar dynasties of India, he briefly narrates the invasion of Alexander the Great and the kingdoms of Jammu, Sialkot and Lahore under Vikramaditya and others. His account of the Punjab under the Sultans and the Mughals is brief. He writes about the Sikhs in the major portion of his book.

He has narrated the sacrifices made by the Sikhs and Sikh *misaldars* to throw off the foreign yoke. His account of the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his successors is based on personal knowledge. He was a revenue officer of the Maharaja. He was fully conversant with the administration of the Maharaja. Besides recording the events, the writer has given a very graphic description of the Maharaja's Court and gives the names of all the important courtiers. He records, "The Maharaja knew all, from the highest to the lowest in the army and called them for various assignments. He created every body according to his status. The Maharaja could recognised a person even after ten years. He knew the names of various Chaudharies, Landlords, Qanungoes and various other official and in the event of emergency addressed Parwanas to them by name. The Maharaja was very generous towards his subordinates. Whosoever came near him was bestowed with honour, fortune add wealth. The persons like me who remained cut off from his presence were most unfortunate. In his court gold and wealth rained from every nook and corner and the courtiers never considered any one equal to themselves."<sup>10</sup> He has not given details about the Anglo-Sikh relations and the British diplomacy during the Anglo-Sikh wars.

Ganesh Das Bادهhra was a great scholar of Persian. He quoted

10. Ganesh Dass Wadehra, *Char Bagh-i-Punjab*, Khalsa College Amritsar, 1965, p. 326.

#### SOME CONTEMPORARY SOURCES OF MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH'S REIGN

verses of Firdausi, Sadi, Hafiz and others frequently. His style is ornate and forceful. He describes the romantic tales of Hir Ranjha, Sohni Mahiwal and Mirza Sahiba with a fervour.

From the historical point of view, the value of Ganesh Das's work is immense. He has given details which are not available in other sources and at several places he has displayed acute understanding of historical facts.

From the historical point of view, the value of contemporary Persian sources on the history of Punjab is immense. In order to write the history of the Maharaja's reign, the native sources must be utilised along with the sources in English and thus foster a more dispassionate and objective study of the period. The contemporary Persian chroniclers recorded the event with vividness and objectivity and these can be depended upon.

## Maharaja Ranjit Singh and His Times

PRITAM SINGH\*

Before I begin addressing the distinguished audience on the subject of today's seminar, I propose to say a few words in appreciation of the Punjab Government's recent realization that agriculture is not the only culture and fighting not the only art that the Punjabi people have been able to develop during their long and vibrant history. Punjab Government's media now use the word 'Culture' more often than before without its favourite prefixes, such as 'agri,' 'horti' and 'seri.' This new addition in the Punjab officialese how-so-ever belated, is welcome because Punjabi people have been using their chisels, pens and brushes, besides their body-language, for their self-expression, with as much ease and dexterity as their ploughs and swords for their sustenance and defence respectively. Not that this fact was unknown to Indian and foreign scholars. In fact, scholars have been quite profuse, in acknowledging the excellence of the linguistic, literary, artistic and religious-philosophical legacy of the Punjab. But, what cannot be denied is the unfortunate fact that the achievements of the Punjabi people, in the areas just mentioned, are either not fully known to the Indian people at large or are not as spontaneously accepted as, for instance, in the case of tilling and fighting. Had successive Punjab Government been blessed with a stronger cultural commitment, they could have done much to dispel ignorance, atleast from the minds of our immediate neighbours. But that has not happened. Now that the talk of enlightening the Punjabis themselves and their other countrymen about Punjab's cultural contribution is in the air it may be interesting to find out, if there are any unseen prejudices also at work, in perpetuating the myth that Punjab is a cultural desert. The answer, unfortunately, may however, around affirmative, if a respectable Punjabi writer's recent experience is to be believed. He was present at the opening ceremony of the World Book Exhibition, recently held at Pragati Maidan in New Delhi. The inauguration was done by the Vice-President of India, Shri Shankar Dayal Sharma. In his speech he chose to dwell, rather extensively,

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on the merits of the Holy Book of the Punjab *Guru Granth Sahib*, and highlighted its catholicity and non-sectarianism. Mr. Sharma expressed the opinion that it was the only Book which could serve as the Common Scripture of the whole of India, rather of the whole world, as it was fully in tune with our concepts of unity, integrity, equality and fraternity. According to my writer-friend, the reference to *Guru Granth* was made by Mr. Sharma with obvious zeal in the interest of national integration, but the whole national media chose to skip over this particular point on which he had waxed so eloquent. My friend seemed ostensibly hurt at the uncalled for anti-integrative role of the reporters. We all know that such omissions, and more so the commissions, do become irksome because they generate a climate wherein the presence of prejudice is readily suspected.

There is no denying the fact that prejudices take time to die, but it must also be within everybody's experience that reason often prevails over prejudices. It is in this connection that the services of the Department of Cultural Affairs are needed the most. I welcome whole-heartedly the acceleration in its working because apart from bridging the gulf between the Government and the people and giving a filip to the writers and artists of the Punjab, the Department will be in a position to project, along with the agrarian and martial perspectives, our spiritual, intellectual and aesthetic perspective also. My fervant hope is that the pace of acceleration will be coterminus neither with the present tenure of my energetic friend Dr Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia, as Director of the Department, nor with the tensivity of the law and order situation in the State.

After this digression, for which I owe an apology to the learned audience, I come to the subject proper of the present Seminar, namely, Maharaja Ranjit Singh. I must say at the outset that Guru Nanak Dev University is a very happy choice as venue for this Seminar because researches done by Dr J.S. Grewal and Dr Indu Banga of the History Department, have already placed the University at the helm of all other centres of higher learning, in the field of Ranjitology and with the establishment of a Chair after the name of Maharaja, in this University, it may be justifiably hoped that hitherto neglected areas of the Maharaja's regime shall also come under closer academic scrutiny. Under the present dispensation, when decision-making is not held up by the checks and balances of normal democratic working of the administrative machinery, it may not be too tall a demand, on the part

of the new Chair to expect from the Punjab Government, xerox copies of the Khalsa Darbar Records preserved in its archives. The valuable original material has not been properly utilised by many scholars yet but an inkling of what an exhaustive examination of these documents by a diligent researcher may yield, can be gauged from the excellent doctoral work of Dr Marie La Font on the French officers of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, which has been accepted recently by the Sorbonne University of Paris.

This Seminar, I am sure, will provide an opportunity to research scholars to throw up many new facts and ideas. Much has already been written on the private life of the Maharaja, his conquering spree, his administrative and agrarian systems, etc., and it is just possible that the adoption of the findings, as a whole, may not be feasible in our time, but there are aspects which deserve greater pointed attention for their relevance to the troubled times that we live in. I propose to refer to only one such aspect in the short time at my disposal.

When the Maharaja was only 20 years old, his fitness for intrepid leadership had already become so patent that he was unanimously elected as the generalissimo of the combined forces of the Misl, called the 'Dal Khalsa.' Both in his capacity as the Chief of Dal Khalsa and his own Shukarchakia Misl, he had to fight the Mughal, Afghan and Pathan forces composed mostly of Mussalmans. The Maharaja's men consisted mainly of Sikhs. In the popular Sikh mind the image of the Mussalman rule was that of a tyrant and ruthless oppressor. On the other hand, the Mussalman psyche regarded the Sikhs as boorish upstarts, absolutely unfit for the high seats of political authority at which they had then set their eyes. That these bitter reactions, which had sunk deep in the mind of both the communities during the force struggle for power that went on throughout the first half of the 18th century, were still lingering among many people even after the Maharaja had taken firm control of the government, is evident from the contemporary writings. For example, in his *Ustat Guru Khalsa Shah Ki*, composed in A.D. 1830, Hakam Singh 'Darvesh' quotes the Maharaja, as having uttered the following words while mourning the death of Akali Phoola Singh in the battle of Multan :

ਕਹਿੰਦਾ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਜੀ, ਤੁਰਕਾਂ ਕਾਫਰਾਂ ਨੇ

ਮੇਰਾ ਕੱਢ ਖਜਾਨਿਓ ਲਾਲ ਚੁਣਿਆ ॥28॥ (ਸਫਾ 40)

Putting the words 'Kafar Turk' in the mouth of the Maharaja for

the defenders of Multan fort is symbolic of the intense contempt lurking in the mind of the writer against Mussalman community. Similarly, Ganesh Das, the author of *Fatehnama Guru Khalsa Ji Ka*, who interprets the same battle as the "Battle between Hindu and Mussalman religions," and repeatedly calls the Maharaja as the 'King of Hindus,' makes the readers believe that the Maharaja was sent by God "to destroy the Turks."

ਦੁਸ਼ਟ ਬਿਡਾਰਨ ਕੋ ਲੀਨੋ ਅਵਤਾਰ ਆਪ

ਕਿਸਨ ਸਰੂਪ ਹੋਵੈ ਕੈ ਅਨੇਕ ਦੇਤ ਘਾਏ ਹੈ

ਤੈਸੇ ਰਣਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਤੁਰਕ ਸੰਘਾਰਨ ਕੋ

ਕਲ ਕੇ ਪ੍ਰਮਾਨ ਜਾਨ ਆਪ ਰੂਪ ਆਏ ਹੈ॥ (ਸਵਾ 136)

Syed Ahmad Brelvi's call to Mussalmans to join him in *jehad* against the infidels, namely, Sikhs, was full of fire and brimstone, venom and vengeance, anger and hatred. The Maharaja was conscious of all this. What was his antidote against the communal hatred whose ferocious brunt was borne by his forefathers?

One thing is certain that the antidote did not require tooth for a tooth and eye for an eye. The Maharaja occupied Lahore in 1799 and died in 1839. Within these forty years a divided house had been coalesced with the result that when he died, his loss evoked highly emotional outbursts from mourners of all communities. Shah Muhammad provides only one specimen of heart-felt reaction. What would have been the policy of a ruler of lesser parts, had fortune thrust greatness upon him in place of Ranjit Singh? Perhaps, he would have allowed full play to his ire and spleen and taught a lesson of their lives to the Mussalmans, whose ruling co-religionists had perpetrated hair-raising tyrannies on the Sikhs only a few decades ago. He might have also recalled to his highly strung mind the instances of collaboration with enemies and betrayal of the Sikhs by Hindus and God knows what he would have done to wreak vengeance on his Hindu subjects. I am sure, at the death of such a ruler every one would have heaved sighs of relief and not a tear would have fallen from the eyes of any one. The conduct of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was just the opposite. Right from the age of 12, when he had to take charge of his father's territories, he began to have a grass-root look at the dynamics of a plural society from the point of its governance. He seems to have arrived at certain conclusions to which he stuck religiously till the last day of his life. What is remarkable in his conduct is the fact that he did so even at the

risk of a head on collision with his fundamentalist co-religionists. Some of the cardinal assumptions that became the determinants of his overall policy may be summarised thus :

1. There can be no social, economic or cultural progress and stability, worth the name, without law and order.
2. Justice is the best stabilizer, but justice does not necessarily mean punishment. Kindness and forgiveness are the noblest forms of 'Punishment' and provide a better basis for law and order than all other punishments combined.
3. Vengeance breeds not only more vigorous vengeance but also generates an epidemic of tension and violence. Vengeance and anger should, therefore, have no place in the policies of the State. The State should not be converted into an instrument of terror for its own people. On the other hand, it should symbolize peace and progress.
4. The State has to have two faces--benevolent and malevolent. Generally speaking, the benevolent face is to be reserved for its own people and the malevolent face for its external aggressors.
5. The State subjects are simply people and not Hindus, Sikhs, Mussalmans, Christians or Jews. The same touchstone has to be applied to all the operators of the State machinery also. In practice no State can be run peacefully on the basis of religious, racial or cultural discrimination or prejudice.
6. The State must provide its people with a purpose for which the State and the people can march together.
7. In the matters of State it is the apex that determines the base.
8. For a tension-free society, the State's slogan has to be 'unite and rule' and not 'divide and rule'.

To me it seems that action of the Maharaja, covering all areas of governmental activity, including the military, the executive and the judiciary, can be traced to one or the other of these assumptions. I believe that these assumptions have great topical relevance for all our present and future rulers. If a person with no formal education and with a not very attractive physical exterior could provide peace and could achieve near success in evolving Punjabi nationalism out of a mutually throat-cutting Hindu-Sikhs-Mussalman rabble, there is no reason why those, who claim to have the benefit of the best educational and administrative training available here or abroad, should not



succeed in bringing about unity. If the disease of communalism is rampant at the social base, certainly the political apex needs hospitalization ; if violence is being increasingly resorted to by the younger generation for redressal of their grievances, it is time for the highest authorities to review and redefine their policies and find out which of these have gone away, if peace is eluding the custodians of law and order, they should join their wise heads to find out if the present forms of torture and punishment are in some measure responsible for the deterioration in this field.

The Maharaja, according to historians, never awarded the capital punishment to anybody to implant terror in the minds of insurgents or criminals. The moot point is : can the State be run today without using violence on its own people ? Mr. Waheed-ud-Din has given photostat copies of the Maharaja's orders, wherein the latter insists that lapses in justice must be brought to his notice and that even his sons should not be treated as being free from the operation of the law of the land. It will certainly be a step in the right direction if the law of the land is allowed full, free and equal operation on all citizens, high or low, in Bharat, that is India.

It is the job of the intellectuals, especially of those in the Universities, to help the State and its administration by drawing lessons for it from history. Like applied science, applied history, may not be placed by scholars at the same pedestal as 'pure' history, but it is my humble submission that it is the crying need of the hour and has to be fulfilled. It is high time for Ranjitologists to bend all their energies primarily to such areas of research as have utilitarian offshoots also.

Once again, I thank the Department of Archives for having arranged this Seminar on Maharaja Ranjit Singh and for having provided me with an opportunity to share some of my views with the members of the distinguished faculty of Guru Nanak Dev University. I also thank the Faculty and the Seminararians for providing a patient hearing to me.

I wish the Seminar success.

## Dr Joshian Harlan, an American, at the Court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh

DEVINDER KUMAR VERMA\*

King and political head of the Punjab, as well as chief of the Khalsa, Maharaja Ranjit Singh aimed at reconciling the various divisions of race and creed among his subjects by employing all in his service.<sup>1</sup> Many foreigners came and found employment at the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Among them, Allard, Avitabile, Court, Ventura, Honigberger, Steinbach, Hurbons, Fetzroy, Gillmore, Leslie, Harvey, Foulkes, Banet, Harlan, etc., were employed on various civil and military duties. With men of such diverse races, nationality and faiths were there to serve him.

Dr Joshian Harlan was a free citizen of the United States of North America, from the State of Pennsylvania and the city of Philadelphia; his father was a Quaker.<sup>2</sup>

Harlan in his early life was a medical student and studied surgery, but he went out as a super cargo in a ship to Canton in China. After some time he returned to America, where he intended to marry a lady to whom he was engaged, but she had played him false.

Harlan was a fine tall gentleman. He dressed himself like Europeans and lived like Indian Nawabs.

From America he came to India, and reached Calcutta, whence Lord Amherst, at that time the Governor-General of India, sent him as Assistant Surgeon with the British Army—Bengal Artillery—to the Burmese Empire<sup>3</sup> in 1825. His services in the Burmese fronts were not worth-while and the orders of dismissal were issued to him at his Ludhiana address where he was enjoying his leave.<sup>4</sup>

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1. General Sir John J.H. Gordon, *The Sikhs*, London, 1904, p. 114.

2. Wolff, *Travels and Adventures*, London, 1861, p. 363.

3. John William Kaye, *War in Afghanistan*, Vol. I, London, 1874, p. 230; Grey Edwardes and Garrett, H.L.O., *European Adventures in Northern India, 1785-1849*, Lahore, 1929, Language Department, Punjab, 1970, p. 252; Prem Singh Hoti, *Khalsa Raj de Badeshi Kartinde*, Ludhiana, 1945, p. 167.

4. Grey and Garrett, *op. cit.*, p. 254; Prem Singh Hoti, *op. cit.*, pp. 170-71.

DR JOSHIAN HARLAN AT THE COURT OF MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH

Now he wanted to proceed towards Afghanistan. For this purpose he needed *rahdari*—a passing slip—from the British Government which he managed from the Political Agent of Ludhiana. He met Shah Shujah, the exiled monarch of Afghanistan, who was under the protection of the East India Company there. Shah Shujah wanted to recapture his lost throne by all means and, therefore, let his schemes known to Harlan.

Harlan agreed to side with him when he was promised a position of high status in Afghanistan. Thus he left Ludhiana as a spy of Shah Shujah for Kabul to provide secret information regarding Dost Mohammad Khan's activities. He had also committed to the British officers that he would send secret information regarding Afghanistan to them. While passing through the Punjab he had a talk of the similar type with the high officials of the Khalsa Darbar. Not only this, he was able to convince Dost Mohammad Khan that he would be providing him information regarding Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the British Government. Thus Harlan tried to serve four masters at a time.

Dr Harlan's betrayal could not continue for long and they came to know about his treacherous role.<sup>5</sup> Under the circumstances he left Kabul and reached Lahore in 1829 where he became very popular with the Sardars whom he treated medically. According to Sohan Lal Suri, he was appointed Governor of Nurpur and Jasrota on a salary of rupees 10.0/- per month in 1829. He remained there until May 1832. He could not win over the sympathies of the people under his control. Rather they complained against him to the Maharaja. The Maharaja transferred him to Gujrat (Pakistan). Sohan Lal Suri records in May 1832 that his salary was fixed at Rs. 1100/- per month. The Maharaja also took a contract from him, which was signed, sealed and deposited in the archives. He was sworn upon his Bible according to the customs of the Sahibs that so long as he lived he would continue to serve the Maharaja, would do nothing foreign to his interests, discharge all his duties faithfully and all the orders conveyed to him through big and small Rajas and the Jamadar (Khushal Singh) would be implicitly

5. In forwarding a letter from Dr Harlan at Kabul, Captain Wade writes, "I suggest that no further communication can be held with him as in my opinion he is merely endeavouring to impose on the Afghans as a British Agent, and letters from us will help him to impose on these simple people." Punjab Records, Book No. 115, letter No. 49, cited in Grey and Garrett, *op.cit.*, p. 254.

obeyed as if they had been given direct by the Maharaja himself.<sup>6</sup> At Gujrat also he proved to be a weak administrator. Just after two months he was called to the Maharaja's court, where he received a stern injunction to mend his ways, as several reports against him from Zamindars had been read to him.

Harlan was alleged to have been an expert in the transmutation of metals. When the Maharaja enquired all this from Honigberger, he laughed and derided his faith. When it was further verified it was discovered that Harlan was making false money.<sup>7</sup>

By the year 1834, Dost Mohammad had fortified his position and wanted the possession of Peshawar which was under the control of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He organised a big army to fight against the Sikhs and sought help from the Amirs of Sindh and Shikarpur. He also won over Sultan Muhammad to his side. In April 1835, he marched towards Peshawar with an army of about 40,000 men. The Maharaja was not prepared for the fight and, therefore, two envoys, Dr Harlan and Faqir Aziz-ud-Din, were sent into the Afghan camp to persuade the Amirs to acquiesce to the Sikh possession of Peshawar. Secondly, the Maharaja wanted that he might gain time to concentrate his forces and also to alienate from Dost Muhammad his brothers at Peshawar. But the proposal of the envoys was not heeded by Dost Muhammad who, on the contrary, wanted to keep the envoys in custody and treat them as hostage for the success of the project. The envoys were arrested and made over to Sultan Mohammad. It was well known to Sultan Mohammad that in case of Afghan success, Peshawar would be retained by Dost Mohammad. Seduced by Harlan and Aziz-ud-Din, Sultan Mohammad withdrew from the Afghan camp with his soldiers and retainers and went over to the Sikhs. The defection had a very bad effect on the Afghan camp and on the morale of the Afghan troops. In the meantime, the Maharaja had strengthened position. On the other hand, Dost Muhammad finding his position weak retired in the night on 11 May 1835. Thus Ranjit Singh gained

6. Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh* (English translation by V.S. Suri), New Delhi, 1961, Vol. III, pp. 42-3; Lawrence, *Adventurers of an Officer in the Punjab in the Service of Ranjit Singh*, London, 1846, p. 28; Wolff, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

7. John Martin Honigberger, *Thirty Five Years in the East, Adventures, Discoveries, Experiments and Historical Sketches relating to the Punjab and Cashmere, etc.*, Calcutta, 1852, p. 55; McGregor, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, London, 1846, p. 274.

a bloodless victory.<sup>8</sup> "His (Dost Muhammad) flight without striking a blow humiliated him a great deal in the eyes of the Afghan Chiefs, particularly when he had adopted the title of *Amir-ul-Mominin* (head of the follows of Islam). He lost much following as his conduct was looked upon as a national disgrace."<sup>9</sup>

In 1836 Maharaja Ranjit Singh had an attack of paralysis of the tongue. Harlan boasted that he could cure the Maharaja. Maharaja sent Devi Sahai Safawali, a trusty courtier, to Harlan at Wazirabad. Harlan demanded Rs. 1,00,000, before he undertook to treat him. He also talked in an undignified manner. All this was conveyed by the messenger to the Maharaja, who flew into rage and ordered that Harlan should be stripped of his position and turned out of the town barefooted.<sup>10</sup> The orders were complied with.

In 1837 Harlan was the leader of Afghan Soldiery in the Khyber Pass. After the battle of Jamrud he was sent back to India. He stayed for some time at Ludhiana. From Ludhiana he was deported to Calcutta and from there he was provided with a free passage to America.<sup>11</sup>

The Maharaja enquired from Burnes, on 18 June 1838, about Covell and Harlan. He said, "both of them had proved untrue to the salt and were not expected to gain anything on account of their faithlessness and were sure to be punished for their misdeed and improper acts in due course of time."<sup>12</sup>

Honigberger, writing about the character of Dr Harlan says that he was an expert in cheating and collected money by foul means from the Punjab.<sup>13</sup> Similarly M'Gregor had a very low opinion of Harlan.<sup>14</sup>

8. G.L. Chopra, *The Punjab as a Sovereign State*, Lahore, 1928, p. 44 ; N.K. Sinha, *Ranjit Singh*, Calcutta, Rep. 1960, p. 59.
9. R.R. Sethi, *The Mighty and Shrewed Maharaja*, New Delhi, 1968, p. 181.
10. Sohan Lal Suri, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 286 ; Grey and Garrett, *op. cit.*, p. 260 ; M'Gregor mentioned that Harlan demanded £ 5,000, cf. Punjab Records, Book No. 142, letter No. 78.
11. Grey and Garrett, *op. cit.*, p. 263.
12. Sohan Lal Suri, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 467.
13. Honigberger, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
14. M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 274.

## Urban Development during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Reign

DR KIRPAL SINGH\*

The urban development in the days of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was conspicuous at the following places :

### A Planned Town—Wazirabad

Wazirabad (21 miles north-west of Gujranwala) situated on the bank of the river Chenab was founded by Wazir Khan<sup>1</sup> (Hakim Ilmuddin), one of the *amirs* of Shah Jahan, the Mughal Emperor, in about 1635-36 A.D. (1045 A.H.). A few villages were detached from Sodhra and Sialkot to form a new *pargana*. Being situated on the trade route and the ferry of river Chenab, it became an important town during the reign of Mohammad Shah in the first half of 18th century.<sup>2</sup> The population of the town dwindled in the beginning of the Sikh rule and it was repopulated by Gurbakash Singh and his son Jodh Singh from whom it was conquered by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1810. In December 1829 Maharaja Ranjit Singh appointed Avitabile as Governor of Wazirabad who remained there upto 1836.<sup>3</sup> During this period he remodelled the old town as has been stated by Lincoln :

"As laid out by him (Avitabile) Wazirabad was parallelogram in shape enclosed by an irregular brick wall. Within is a broad and straight bazar running from end to end and crossed at right angles by minor streets, also straight and of good width, the whole being marked by an almost entire absence of the tortuous *culs de sac* so

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1. He is same Wazir Khan who built a mosque at Lahore. He belonged to Chinot where he also built a brick fort. For detail of his life see, "*The Ma'asir-ul-Umra*," translated by Beveridge, Vol. II, Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1952, pp. 81-83.
2. Ganesh Dass, *Char Bagh-i-Punjab* (edited by Kirpal Singh), Amritsar, 1965, p. 250.
3. C. Grey and Garrett, H. L. O., *European Adventurers of Northern India*, Govt. Printing Press, Lahore, 1929, pp. 125-29.

general in the towns of purely native design."<sup>4</sup>

Wolff, who visited Wazirabad in 1831 and met Avitabile, writes, "He was governor of Wazirabad which he has remarkably improved. "He [Avitabile] had kept the streets of the city clean."<sup>5</sup> Lieut. William Barr has described this town in following words (1830): "We passed beneath a lately constructed and lofty gateway...The streets we traversed was broad, clean and possessed of some good houses."<sup>6</sup>

Ganesh Dass, a contemporary writer, has given vivid description of various gardens which were laid there, "In the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh many eminent persons laid out orchards and gardens outside the city. The garden of Kirpa Ram Chopra adjoining the city is well-known. The garden of Diwan Thakur Das Chopra, who served Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu, is also beautiful. Similarly the gardens of Kishan Kaur Bania, Lorindi Shah Arora son of Bhanu Shah, Khushal Singh Jamadar and Uttam Singh Chhachi are in a flourishing state. The *sarai* of Wazirabad, in which the Maharaja used to stay, is a beautiful place. It has a pleasing garden and a high tower."<sup>7</sup>

Col. Steinbach writes, "In point of architecture, Wazirabad may take precedence of any other town in the Punjab. This is owing to the exertions of General Avitabile, an European, lately in service of the Sikh government who spent much of his accumulated wealth in decorating and improving the locality of his residence. The streets are broad and bazars exceedingly commodious."<sup>8</sup>

The remodelled city was so much liked by the British that it was made the headquarters of a district which included the present districts of Sialkot, Gujranwala together with parts of Gurdaspur and Lahore districts. In 1852, however, it lapsed to its present position and became a sub-district headquarter of district Gujranwala.<sup>9</sup> According to Census of 1881 its population was 1646.<sup>10</sup>

4. Edward Lincoln, *Gujranwala District Gazetteer*, Lahore, 1935, p. 348.

5. Quoted in *European Adventurers of Northern India*, p. 127.

6. William Barr, *Journal of March from Delhi to Cabul*, Patiala, 1970, p. 79.

7. Ganesh Dass, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

8. Steinbach, *The Punjab*, Patiala, 1970, pp. 5-6.

9. Edward Lincoln, *op. cit.*, p. 349.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Wazirabad had been centre for boat manufacturing.<sup>11</sup> Its hosiery used to find a market all over upper India but it suffered keen competition of the imported article. Chenille was once made here. Mr. Lockwood Kipling, the late principal of Mayo School of Art, wrote, "At Wazirabad a triviality of English introduction has found a place in the manufacture of chenille. Many years ago it was fashionable to make silk into strings reserve being elongated caterpillars, and it is still used as a trimming. The original massive form is preserved at Wazirabad."<sup>12</sup>

Wazirabad was one of the important trade centres on the river Chenab. The Chenab was navigable from its confluences with Jehlum to Akhnur in Jammu territory about 50 miles above Wazirabad. A considerable trade was carried on both up and down the stream. Timber from the Jammu Hills, sugar, ghee, wheat, coarse cotton cloth, hides and dry skins of sheep and goats were sent downstream to Multan from where they were taken to Kabul via Dera Ghazi Khan.<sup>13</sup>

Wazirabad was thus one of the important cities of the Lahore kingdom under Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

#### A Flourishing Town of Gujranwala

Another important town which owes its flourishing position to Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his family is Gujranwala. Situated on the Grand Trunk Road and forty two miles north west of Lahore the ancient capital of the Punjab has been mentioned by different names. Henry T. Prinsep calls it Gujarauli and Baron Charls Hugel Gursersoli.<sup>14</sup>

Gujranwala came up as a town with the rise of Sikh power. We do not find any mention of it in *Ain-i-Akbari*. Rather it was under the Pargna headquarter of Eminabad. Jehangir has mentioned its adjoining village Karjakh<sup>15</sup> but not Gujranwala. Gujranwala appears to have been founded by Charhat Singh,<sup>16</sup> grandfather of Maharaja Ranjit

11. F.C. Arora, *Commerce by River in the Punjab*, Punjab Government Record Office, p. 93 (Monograph No. 9).

12. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

14. Henry T. Prinsep, *Origin of Sikh Power in the Punjab*, Language Department, Patiala, 1970, p. 26 ; Baron Hugel, *Travels in Cashmere and the Punjab*, London, 1845, p. 269.

15. Jehangir, *Tuzuk-i-Jehangiri*, Nawal Kishore Press, Lucknow, pp. 322-49.

16. Ghulam Sarwar, *Makhzan-Tarikh-i-Punjab*, pp. 264-65.



Singh, Mahan Singh. Charhat Singh's son did a lot to make this town popular. He persuaded the inhabitants of nearby village Syednagar to shift to this place where they were allowed to built their homes.<sup>17</sup> A portion of the town is still named after their village. After Mahan Singh Maharaja Ranjit Singh remained in Gujranwala upto 1799 A.D. Afterwards it was given in *jagir* to Hari Singh Nalwa.

Hari Singh Nalwa greatly contributed to the prosperity of this town. He used to receive the foreign visitors here. Hugel has recorded the account of his meeting with Hari Singh Nalwa in 1836. About Baradari of Hari Singh it has been stated that it was a "a good specimen of Sikh architecture."<sup>18</sup> Lieut. William Barr writes, "This is one of the prettiest Eastern Homes I have ever seen. It consists of three storeys, each containing a room about sixteen feet square, lower ones enclosed by varandah. A range of fountains extends close to the extreme front."<sup>19</sup> Baron Charles Hugel has greatly admired the garden and has given its lengthy description.<sup>20</sup> David Ross writes about the garden in 1883 "It abounds in fine fruit trees especially orange trees imported from Malta by General Avitabile of the Sikh service."<sup>21</sup>

The villages surrounding the present town of Gujranwala were in ruins during the Mughal period. "Before the close of the Muhammadan period a mysterious depopulation took place, the reasons for which have never been properly made out. Some consider it was owing to the great famine and devastating wars by which the Punjab was convulsed during the last-years of Muhammadan supremacy."<sup>22</sup> Ranjit Singh took lot of pains to rehabilitate the deserted villages which ultimately contributed to the prosperity of Gujranwala. According to *Gujranwala District Gazetteer*, "There were intimate connection of many of the leading Sikh families with the Maharaja such as Hari Singh Nalwa of Gujranwala, Misar Diwan Chand of Gondlawala (a village near Gujranwala), all best governors such as Dewan Sawan Mal of Akalgarh, Dewan Dhanpat Rai of Sodhra and successful courtiers such as Jawahar Singh of Ramnagar, Jai Singh Man and Sardar Sham Singh of

17. Ali-ud-Din Mufti, *Ibrat Namah*; Lahore, 1961, p. 373.

18. *Gujranwala District Gazetteer*, 1893-94, pp. 26-27.

19. Lt. William Barr, *op.cit.*, p. 75.

20. Baron Charles Hugel, *op.cit.*, p. 75.

21. David Ross, *The Land of the Five Rivers and Sind*, Patiala, 1970, p. 137.

22. *Ibid.*,

Butala—from this district.<sup>23</sup>

### **Expansion of Amritsar and its Trade and Industry**

Before Ranjit Singh Amritsar was divided amongst nearly a dozen families owning different parts of the town. These families had built fortresses in their localities and maintained a retinue of armed tax collectors who molested the traders and shopkeepers.<sup>24</sup> Maharaja Ranjit Singh brought the entire populace under his administration.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh raised the status of Amritsar by making it the summer capital of his kingdom. He used to stay here for about four months in a year. He often received here important British dignitaries.<sup>25</sup>

Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule represented a change wherein old nobility (misaldars) had been absorbed and new nobility had been created. In the 18th century the old nobility had carved out their localities in the sacred city. The new nobility, viz., courtiers of Maharaja Ranjit Singh were equally keen to own different areas in Amritsar where the Maharaja used to stay for a number of months. Encouraged by the Maharaja a number of localities developed. These localities were named after the name of their founders who were the prominent persons of those times. The important localities were :

(1) **Katra Bhai Sant Singh Giani** : Bhai Sant Singh had been put in charge of repairs and beautification of Darbar Sahib by the Maharaja.

(2) **Dhab Bhai Vasti Ram** : Bhai Vasti Ram was a holy man whose *samadh* was outside Lahore fort. His sons Bhai Ram Singh and Bhai Gobind Jas were courtiers of the Maharaja.

(3) **Katra Moti Ram** : Moti Ram was son of Mohkam Chand, a general of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

(4) **Katra Kanwar Kharak Singh** : Kharak Singh was the son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. This Katra was also known Katra Nikkai because mother of Kharak Singh Raj Kaur belonged to Nikkai Misal.

(5) **Katra Hakima** : This was founded by Faqir Aziz-ud-Din, the Foreign Minister of Ranjit Singh. Incidentally Aziz-ud-Din was also a Hakim, a physician.

23. *Gujranwala District Gazetteer*, p. 22, "The Comparative prosperity of this district dates from the advent of the Sikhs."

24. Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, London, 1964, p. 206.

25. Metcalf, Henry Fane and Lord Auckland were received here.

(6) **Katra Nihal Singh Attariwala :** Nihal Singh Attariwala was father of Sardar Sham Singh Attariwala who most valiantly fell fighting in the battle of Sabraon in 1846. Sham Singh's daughter had been married to Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh, grandson of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

(7) **Katra Karam Singh :** Karam Singh belonged to village Rangar Nangal (District Gurdaspur). He was an important courtier of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Out of twelve gates of fortification of Amritsar one was named Deodi Rangar Nangalian. Since Arjan Singh fought against the British in Second Sikh War the family was severely punished by the British.

(8) **Katra Mit Singh Padhanian :** Mit Singh was important general of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (for detail see *Chiefs and Families of Note in the Punjab*, Lahore, 1909, Vol. I, pp. 378-80).

(9) **Katra Kanwar Sher Singh :** Kanwar Sher Singh was son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Mehtab Kaur, the daughter of Sada Kaur, leader of Kanhiya Misal.

(10) **Katra Fateh Singh Kalianwala :** Fateh Singh of village Kala (near Khalsa College Amritsar) was a general of the Maharaja.

#### City of Gardens

Maharaja Ranjit Singh made Amritsar a city of gardens. Ganesh Dass Wadehra, mentions the existence of following gardens inside the city—Bagh-i-Guru; Bagh-i-Akali; garden of Attar Singh Kalianwala and Misar Rulia Ram. Around Ram Bagh which was laid for the comfort of the Maharaja, there were laid numerous new gardens belonging to various courtiers like Misar Beli Ram, Prince Kharak Singh, Tara Singh, Jawala Singh Pathania, Desai Singh Majithia, Gurmukh Singh Giani, Jamadar Khushal Singh and others.<sup>26</sup> The modern Rani Bagh belonged to Tej Singh who got the title of Raja after First Anglo Sikh War in 1846. Besides these there are mentioned numerous gardens which existed in Amritsar in the times of Ranjit Singh. Samdula Kashmiri Muslim was very well known person of Amritsar. He was famous for his generosity. He had his garden outside Sultanwind Gate.<sup>27</sup> Near Ram Bagh there used to be a garden of Gul

26. Ganesh Dass, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

27. *Ibid.*

Bahar Begum, the Muslim wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.<sup>28</sup> But the most important garden in Amritsar which formed a part of summer palace was named Ram Bagh. It was laid by the orders of Maharaja Ranjit Singh on the pattern of Shalamar Garden, Lahore. At its old site there use to be a mud fort belonging to the Bhangi Chiefs. The grounds were encircled by solid masonry walls some fourteen feet high and rampart carrying guns. This was constructed by the orders of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1819 A.D. Outside the side wall was a moat filled with water. Within this structure a beautiful garden was laid by Kirpa Ram son of Dewan Moti Ram. In the middle of the garden a luxurious two storeyed palace was built. These were constructed cool underground apartments for use in the hot weather. Nearby was a swimming bath for the ladies of the Royal house hold. Small palaces were provided for the chiefs. Both garden and buildings were constructed under the supervision of Faqir Aziz-ud-Din, Sardar Desa Singh and Sardar Lehna Singh Majithia. The red stone work of all these buildings was executed by workmen brought from Delhi by Faqir Aziz-ud-Din.<sup>29</sup>

Maharaja Ranjit Singh appears to have taken personal interest in the development of this city. V. Jacquemont who visited Amritsar on the 8th March 1831 records, "Amritsar is the largest city in the Punjab. Its area can be reduced to about 10,000 metres. I put the population between 1,00,000 to 2,00,000. There is more movement and more life in Amritsar than in any other town in British India and it is the first city I have seen with obvious signs of expansion. The bazars are very numerous in general and the houses of merchants have homes three or four storeys high, the front being whitened and covered with coarse mythological pictures."<sup>30</sup>

Another contemporary writer Ganesh Dass Wadehra writes :

ਇਖਰੂਜ਼ ਮਿਸਲੇ ਅਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ ਦਰ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਸ਼ਹਿਰ ਕਲਾਂ ਦੀਗਰ ਨੀਸਤ ।

ਸੋਦਾਗਰਾਂ ਅਜ਼ ਹਰ ਵਲਾਯਤ ਆਮਦਾ ਆਂ ਜਾ ਆਬਾਦ ਸ਼ੁਦੰਦ ।

ਅਕਸਰ ਕੋਮੇ ਖਤਰੀਆਨ ਲਾਹੌਰੀ ਦਰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ ਸਕੂਨਤ ਵਾ ਵਤਨ ਇਖਤਿਆਰ ਕਰਦੰਦ ।<sup>31</sup>

"Today no other city in the whole of the Punjab is as large as

28. Khushwant Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 245; Giani Gian Singh, *Twarikh-i-Amritsar*, 1923, p. 23.

29. V.N. Datta, *Amritsar Past and Present*, pp. 180-81.

30. V. Jacquemont and A. Soltykoff, *The Punjab—A Hundred Years Ago*, Language Department, Punjab, Patiala, 1971, p. 25.

31. Ganesh Dass, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

Amritsar. Merchants from all countries have come to Amritsar and settled here. Many Khatries of Lahore have adopted Amritsar as their home." At another place he writes that the *sahukars* of Amritsar are extremely rich. In the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh Rama Shah Bania was the most distinguished among them.<sup>32</sup>

Regarding textile manufacture in Amritsar Jacquemont wrote, "At Amritsar a large quantity of woollen stuff is manufactured, a kind of coarse cloth. This is dyed bright, scarlet and exported to other parts of India. It is used by the middle classes as winter clothing. The Kashmiris manufacture it from common wool, a sort of serge, very thick and warm. Many of Sikh horsemen have cloaks of this material which they use in winter or during the rains. But the greater part of the Kashmiris is occupied in cleaning the shawls brought from Kashmir and destined for the Indian market."<sup>33</sup>

Maharaja Ranjit Singh transformed the town of Amritsar into the biggest commercial city. Baron Hugel wrote, "Amritsar is now the richest city in the northern India....It is larger city than Lahore. The wealth of the whole Punjab seems collected in it and the great merchants have made it their abode.... I felt agitated with various emotions as my elephant passed the city gates where Thanedar was waiting with numerous deputation of merchants to receive me. Amritsar is most bustling of all cities in the Punjab, in every street the most beautiful production of India are seen exhibited for sale."<sup>34</sup>

With regard to handicrafts of Amritsar Steinbach wrote, "Shawls are made in considerable numbers at Amritsar."<sup>35</sup> Similarly Walter Hamilton regarded Amritsar as a "Grand Emporium of trade" for shawl and saffron of Kashmir and for various other commodities from the Deccan and Eastern part of India.<sup>36</sup>

There were certain historical and geographical factors which led Amritsar to develop rapidly in the commercial and industrial fields during the first half of 19th century. Maharaja Ranjit Singh by conquering Kangra and Kashmir brought these areas within the proximity of Amritsar. Kashmir wool and shawl needed market which was provided by this sacred city that was frequently visited by the Maharaja

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 294-95.

33. V. Jacquemont, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

34. *Travels in Cashmere and the Punjab*, Language Department, Patiala, 1970.

35. Steinbach, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

36. Cited in V.N. Datta's, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

and the courtiers. Moreover, Diwali, Dussehera and Baisakhi festivals attracted large gathering from commercial activities of the trading classes. The varied products of Kangra and Mandi Hills were gathered there and exchanged for the produce of the plains.

About 1833 A.D. there occurred a famine in Kashmir. Consequently a number of Kashmiri skilled labourers migrated to Amritsar. The Kashmiris brought with them instruments and technique to develop shawl industry and manufacture of thick warm blankets which the horsemen of the Sikh army used in winter. The shawls, carpets, silk and cotton fabrics were exported from Amritsar to other parts of India. There was a great demand of shawls in Hyderabad, Lucknow and states of Rajputana. The shawls of Kashmir were exported from Amritsar.<sup>37</sup>

#### Multan

According to Steinbach Multan was the third town in order of importance in the kingdom of Ranjit Singh. He writes, "Its modern consequence arises from the great extent of commerce of which it is the seat, the banking transactions particularly giving it a prominence over all other towns in Western India."<sup>38</sup> Again he asserts, "At the risk of repetition, he may be stated that the principal marts of commerce of the country are Mooltan, Umritsar, Leia and Lahore."<sup>39</sup>

On account of Nadir's invasion and decline of the Mughal Empire Multan suffered a lot. One Zehad Khan was appointed as Nawab of Multan by Mohammad Shah, the Mughal Emperor, the Nawabs who succeeded him were continually engaged in internal conflicts with their relations.<sup>40</sup> In the times of Ranjit Singh Sawan Mal ruled the province from 1821 to 1844. He improved the condition of Multan by making a canal of 300 miles in this province<sup>41</sup> which ultimately contributed to the prosperity of the city of Multan.

Alexander Burnes who visited Multan on June 15, 1831 writes, "The city of Multan is upwards of three miles in circumference, surrounded by a dilapidated wall and overlooked on north by fortress of strength. It contains a population of about 60,000 souls one third of whom may be Hindus. The rest of the population is Muhamadan,

37. David Ross, *op. cit.*, pp. 193-94.

38. Steinbach, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

40. Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

41. *Ibid.*

for though it is subject to the Seikhs, their number is confined to the garrison which does not exceed 500 men. Many of the houses evidently stand on the ruins of others, they are built of burnt brick and have flat roofs. They sometime rise to the height of six storeys. The inhabitants are chiefly weavers and dyers of cloth." "The silk manufacture of Multan is *Kais* [piece of silk] and may be had of all colours and from the value of 20 to 100 rupees per piece. It is less delicate in texture than the "loongee" of Bhawalpoor."<sup>42</sup>

Maharaja Ranjit Singh took special interest in encouraging the silk trade in Multan as has been testified by Alexander Burnes who writes, "Ranjit Singh has with much propriety encouraged this manufacture since he captured the city and by giving no other cloth at his court has greatly increased their consumption, they are worn as Sashes and scarfs by all Sikh Sardars. They are exported to Khorasan and India and duties levied are moderate." With regard to the trade route to India he wrote, "...the route by Jaysulmeer and Beecaneer is chosen in preference to that of Sind, from the trade being on more equitable footing. The trade of Multan is much the same as at Bhawalpoor. But it is on a large scale for it has forty shroffs (money changers) chiefly natives of Shikurpoor."<sup>43</sup>

Vigne writes about the silk manufacture, "Multan is famous for its silk manufacture. I visited house of a weaver, it presented a very different appearance from a shawl maker in Kashmir. Seven hundred mounds of raw silk are brought to Multan every year by the Lohanis chiefly from Bokhara and Turkistan: these are manufactured in one hundred and fifty workshops. One man will finish an ordinary *Kais* in six days, perhaps three yards long and a foot and half wide. The red colour is most valuable, it is dyed with cochineal which is brought from either Bombay or Bokhara. Multan is also famous for its carpets and embroidery."<sup>44</sup>

Maharaja Ranjit Singh gave impetus to urban development by encouraging trade and industry. Many small towns were converted into cities, bringing more people into the orbit of urbanisation. Maharaja Ranjit Singh took personal interest in encouragement of silk textile of Multan and ordered that all courtiers should use Sashes

42. Alexander Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara*, Vol. I, London, 1834, pp. 94-98.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Multan District Gazetteer*, 1883-84, Lahore, 1927, p. 271.

of Amritsar.<sup>45</sup> Before Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule Wazirabad was an insignificant town and just before annexation by the British it had risen to be one of the most important cities of the land of five rivers and the British made it the centre of their administration in their region.<sup>46</sup> Phillaur on the bank of Sutlej was an insignificant place. The *sarai* built by Shahjehan had decayed. The Maharaja occupied it in 1807 and recognised its importance as frontier town commanding most frequented ferry of river Sutlej. The Maharaja built there a fort which attracted population and later on it developed into an important border town of the Lahore kingdom.<sup>47</sup> Similar the case with Attock, on the bank of river Indus where the Maharaja encouraged the manufacture of boats.<sup>48</sup> Similarly the city of Peshawar was patronised by ordering the manufacture of guns for the state force there. According to William Barr the guns casted in Lahore kingdom were not inferior to the guns of the East India Company.<sup>49</sup> Maharaja Ranjit Singh tried his best to revive paper industry of Sialkot. Mr. Prinsep gives the number of mills at work at the time of his settlement as 82 employing nearly 1000 men.<sup>50</sup> Ganesh testifies the revival of prosperity of the city under Maharaja Ranjit Singh as he writes, "New gardens were laid out"<sup>51</sup> (gives the details about the gardens and various *Khanqas* and *Mazars* of holy men of Islam). In Lahore Shalimar Garden was in ruins. The Maharaja renovated the old monuments. He also established a *Karkhana* for casting of guns near Shaha de Garhi. This was shown to Captain Murray by the Maharaja and subsequently Murray wrote to Wade that the guns casted there were not only supplied to the Sikh forces but were exported to other countries also.<sup>52</sup> Thus almost all the cities in the Lahore kingdom were greatly developed in the days of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

45. *Multan District Gazetteer*, 1883-84, pp. 268-69.

46. *Gujranwala District Gazetteer*, 1893-94, p. 46.

47. *Jalandhar District Gazetteer*, 1883-84, p. 73.

48. Prem Singh, *Punjab Da Samajak Itihas* (Punjabi), Punjabi University, Patiala, 1979, p. 84.

49. William Barr, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

50. *Sialkot District Gazetteer*, 1894-95, p. 103.

51. J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, *Early 19th Century Punjab*, translated and edited Amritsar, 1975, pp. 85-86.

52. Prem Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 51; Letter No. 23 of 1st January 1827, *Papers of Wade*, Volume 15.



## Character and Personality of Maharaja Ranjit Singh

DR BHAGAT SINGH\*

Undoubtedly Ranjit Singh has been considered as the most outstanding ruler of his time in the whole of Asia. The foreign travellers visiting India would not miss to come to the Punjab particularly with a view to having audience with the famed Maharaja. Besides the foreign visitors the officials and the high dignitaries of the East India Company took pride in having a meeting with the Maharaja. Whosoever happened to meet him could not but get deeply influenced by him. Alexander Burnes who came to Lahore to deliver to Ranjit Singh the presents of the King of England wrote, "I never quitted the presence of a native of Asia with such impressions as I left this man : without education, and without a guide, he conducts all the affairs of his kingdom with surprising energy and vigour and yet he wields his power with a moderation quite unprecedented in an eastern prince."<sup>1</sup> Referring to his bravery and intrepidity the French traveller Jacquemont says, "Should Ranjit Singh think he could prudently absent himself for sometime from the Punjab nothing would be easier for him than to reconquer the whole of Afghanistan. Ranjit Singh is the only power which has stood with that of the British."<sup>2</sup> G.T. Vigne who has offered not a presentable picture of the Maharaja's personality has not failed to note that, "if he had not been restrained by the gigantic power of the East India Company, Ranjit would long ago have been seated on the throne of Delhi, a great Mughal in all but his religion."<sup>3</sup> Referring to his high ambition John Clark Marshman remarks, that, "he was the most extraordinary man of the age between Constantinople and Peking and with the help of his forces and his lofty spirit of ambition he would have founded another Empire in Hindustan, had there been

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1. Alexander Burnes, *The Travels into Bokhara*, Vol. I, London, 1834, p. 33.
2. Jacquemont, *Letters from India*, Vol. II, London, 1834, p. 139.
3. G.T. Vigne, *Travels in Kashmir, Ladakh, etc.*, Vol. II, London, 1844, p. 421.

no Treaty of Amritsar (1809)."<sup>4</sup>

Ranjit Singh has been likened to Mehmat Ali of Egypt by Vigne<sup>5</sup> and to Napoleon Bonaparte of France by Victor Jacquemont.<sup>6</sup> But there are some points in which he resembles both. Estimating his character with reference to the circumstances in which he was brought up and the position in which he started his career, he was more remarkable than either.<sup>7</sup> The Maharaja exercised supreme authority over his subjects and none could ever defy his orders. In the words of Jacquemont, "He is better obeyed by his subjects than the Mughal Emperors at the zenith of their power."<sup>8</sup>

### THE MAHARAJA—AS A MAN

#### Physical Appearance

All the contemporary records are similar and unanimous in telling that Ranjit Singh's physical appearance was not attractive. Osborne describes him ill-looking at first sight. He did not possess the tallness of a Jat Sikh of the Punjab and was weak and infirm in legs but when he would mount a horse he would be transformed and all infirmities disappeared.<sup>9</sup> Baron Hugel who visited the Maharaja at his court testifies to his unattractive appearance.<sup>10</sup> He further writes that, "as soon as he mounts his horse, and with his black shield at his back, puts him on his mettle his whole form seems animated by the spirit within, and assumes a certain grace of which no body could believe it susceptible."<sup>11</sup>

M'gregor who visited the Maharaja at Lahore describes his physical appearance in the following words : "To look at the man, little of the hero can be discovered ; he is small in stature ; and his face, disfigured with small-pox, and deprived of the left eye from the same cause, it is not much indebted to nature for its external beauty. His remaining eye is very large; and there is fire and brilliancy about it, when he becomes animated, which at once discover the energetic mind and discriminating character of its owner. His smile is pleasing, and the

4. J.C. Marshman, *History of India*, Vol. III, London, 1867, pp. 39-40.

5. G.T.Vigne, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 419.

6. Jacquemont, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 400.

7. Thornton, *History of the Punjab*, Vol. II, London, 1846, p. 174.

8. Jacquemont, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 399.

9. Osborne, *The Court and Camp of Ranjit Singh*, London, 1840, p. 32.

10. Baron Hugel, *Travels in Kashmir and the Punjab*, London, 1845, p. 380.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 381.

manner of address easy and unembarrassed on all occasions ; he never appears at a loss for words to express his ideas, which are quickly formed on any subject when discoursing, he at once grasped the whole bearings of the subject, and his reasoning powers and discriminating acumen are of the highest order. In his youth Ranjit was remarkably active, an excellent horseman, and well skilled in every thing connected with military feats. He was ever foremost in battle and the last to retreat ; there is no instance of his being embarrassed or evincing anything like fear, on record. His whole life has been spent in warfare, and he even now prefers a tent, or any temporary residence, to the gilded palace."<sup>12</sup>

He always dressed himself in plain, simple and unostentatious clothes even on stately occasions. But he always desired of his courtiers to dress themselves gorgeously with rich ornaments on their persons. The spell of his personality was so strong that no body could dare to speak at his court without being addressed to. Once in 1831 Faqir Aziz-ud-Din was questioned by an English man as from which eye the Maharaja was blind. The Faqir replied that "the respectful awe of the Maharaja is so great that I could never dare to look at his face from a close quarter."

#### Humane and Generous

Almost by all the contemporary writers Ranjit Singh has been described as extremely humane and kind. He never wantonly stained his hands in blood. Never perhaps was so large an empire founded by one with so little criminality.<sup>13</sup> His mild and prudent government would not put to death any of his enemy chiefs, Muslim, Hindu or Sikh whom he had displaced. Except in open warfare he had never been known to take life though his own had been attempted more than once. His reign was free from any striking acts of cruelty and oppression than those of many so called more civilized monarchs.<sup>14</sup> Emphatically enough Lord Lawrence writes about his humanity, "True he slew and conquered as all orientals do...but with him we hear of no after massacres ; of no after impalings or flogging ; of no pyramids

12. M'gregor, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, London, 1846, pp. 215-16.

13. Baron Hugel, *op. cit.*, p. 382.

14. Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 36 ; cf. Baron Hugel, *op. cit.*, p. 317 ; Prinsep, *Political Life of Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, Calcutta, 1834, p. 180 ; Burnes, *op. cit.*, Vol. I p. 143 ; M'Gregor, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 281 ; Jacquemont, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 25.

of heads or of men built into *minars* to serve as mile-stones of all which atrocities he must have had examples before him. He maimed but it was to save life and to clear the highways of robbers; but he never took life in cold blood."<sup>15</sup> H.E. Fane, who visited Lahore in 1837, highlights Ranjit Singh's humane character and his kind disposition by remarking, "His exceeding kindness and good nature throughout our entire visit makes us believe that such is his real character. At all events, it is certain, that without the punishment of death this chief manages to keep his wild people in perfect subjection."<sup>16</sup>

During his leisure the Maharaja found time to feed tame pigeons and domestic fowls with his own hands. Should he happen to hear a fowl scream or a goat bleat piteously when caught for being slaughtered, the Maharaja would at once order its release.<sup>17</sup> He was also very fond of children.<sup>18</sup> When Avitabile, governor of Peshawar, hanged some miscreants, the Maharaja reprimanded him and was of the opinion that he ought to have imprisoned the criminals and then allowed them to escape.<sup>19</sup>

According to Sir John Gordon, the Maharaja was always generous to the vanquished and would never reduce any one to desperation. There was never any sentimental manifestation in his politics and he would never leave in his state a hostile or disgruntled power that might built up rebellion against him.<sup>20</sup> During Ranjit Singh's period, one could see many people belonging to royal families moving about in the bazars of Delhi and Kabul and just living in sheer penury without any means of subsistence. But in the Punjab there was not a family, whose territory was annexed by the Maharaja to his state, that was not given a *jagir* or pension sufficient to have decent living. This concession and generous principle was not applied to only the Sikh chiefs but to the Muslims and others also. In the words of Khushwant Singh, "Ranjit Singh was far more considerate in dealing with his Muslim adversaries than he was with the Sikh or the Hindu."<sup>21</sup>

15. *Calcutta Review*, August 1844; cf. Mohan Lal, *Journal of Travels in the Punjab, Afghanistan, etc.*, Calcutta, 1834, pp. 13-14.

16. H.E. Fane, *Five Years in India*, Vol. I, London, 1842, pp. 95-96.

17. Waheed-ud-Din, *The Real Ranjit Singh*, Karachi, 1965, p. 166.

18. M'gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 281.

19. Honigberger, *Thirty Five Years in the East*, Calcutta, edition, 1905, p. 55.

20. Gordon, *The Sikhs*, London, 1904, p. 111.

21. Khushwant Singh, *Ranjit Singh, Maharaja of the Punjab 1780-1839*, London, 1962, p. 52.

To have a clear idea of the Maharaja's treatment of the vanquished rulers it is worthwhile to mention a few instances. During Ranjit Singh's occupation of Lahore, Chet Singh, who was ousted from the fort of Lahore, was given two villages in *jagir*,<sup>22</sup> and was permitted to take all his movable property with him to his *jagir* at Vineke where he could live in perfect peace and comfort.<sup>23</sup> After annexing Akalgarh in 1801 Dal Singh's widow was given a *jagir* of two villages.<sup>24</sup> Mai Sukhan, the widow of the Bhangi ruler Gulab Singh, after having been dispossessed of Amritsar in 1805, was granted some villages in *jagir* for her maintenance.<sup>25</sup> Qutab-ud-Din of Kasur was given a *jagir* in Memdot worth an annual income of one lakh rupees.<sup>26</sup> When the Maharaja annexed the territory of Tara Singh Gaiba, his widow was given two or three villages for her maintenance.<sup>27</sup> After Ranjit Singh captured Sialkot he gave a few villages in *jagir* to its ousted master Jiwan Singh.<sup>28</sup> After the death of Jaimal Singh Kanaihya his territory was annexed but his widow was given an annual *jagir* of fifteen thousand rupees.<sup>29</sup> After the occupation of Multan the *jagir* of Sharakpur was conferred on the sons of the late ruler of that state.<sup>30</sup> The deposed ruler Ahmad Khan Sial was given a *jagir* of Mirowal.<sup>31</sup>

Ranjit Singh always treated the vanquished chief with respect and granted him liberal terms and even robes of honour. The defeated chief along with his relatives and entourage was comfortably conducted to a place of safety and an allowance was granted for their maintenance.<sup>32</sup>

Ranjit Singh was well-known for his generosity of heart. He rewarded his officials very handsomely and entertained foreigners with lavish hospitality. According to Sohan Lal Suri, Jacquemont, the French traveller, thanked the Maharaja saying that he "had proved a

22. Gian Singh, *Raj Khalsa* (2nd edition Urdu), pp. 72-73.

23. Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Twarikh*, Daftar II, Lahore, 1885, p. 43.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

26. Amar Nath; *Zafarnama-i-Ranjit Singh* (edited by Sita Ram Kohli), Lahore, 1928, p. 40; Sohan Lal Suri, *op. cit.*, II, p. 64.

27. Sohan Lal Suri, *op. cit.*, II, p. 67.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

29. Gian Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

30. Sohan Lal Suri, *op. cit.*, II, p. 225.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

32. Introduction (by Muhammad Baqir) to Mufti Ali-ud-Din's *Ibratnama*, Vol. I, Lahore, 1961, p. 15.

unique person in observing ceremonies of friendship so much so that in the whole world not a single person could be quoted as an equal to him and that without doubt and without exaggeration he was one of the unique persons of the age from the view-point of hospitality.<sup>33</sup> It is said that every night gold and money was placed under the Maharaja's pillow which was distributed to the poor and needy in the morning irrespective of their religious affiliations. This was his daily routine.<sup>34</sup> Ganesh Das Badehra, an official of the Maharaja, speaking about his generosity says, "whenever a person reached his (Maharaja's) presence he was made happy with a *khilat* and money. He gave away gold and money with utmost liberality...He raised large amounts of money from the sardars and officers and distributed it as gifts, charity and endowments and earned a good name thereby."<sup>35</sup>

#### A Devoted Follower of Sikhism

The Maharaja was imbued with genuine respect for the Sikh scriptures and the Sikh religion. He was very particular about the daily recital of the *Guru Granth Sahib* in his presence. He received inspiration from the *Gurbani* and the devotional music. According to Ali-ud-Din Mufti the Maharaja was always attended, on his tours, by a priest with a volume of the holy *Granth*, the procession was often followed by a number of priests on elephants. Besides this every regiment had its own volume of the *Guru Granth Sahib* and religious insignia. Even the ministers of the state carried copies of the holy *Granth* on their tours.<sup>36</sup> After each military victory the Maharaja paid a thanksgiving visit to the holy Golden Temple at Amritsar and offered money for the distribution of holy *karah prashad* and illumination. He spent considerable sums of money on the maintenance of religious institutions. There was a separate estate attached to every shrine, the produce of which was utilised in the maintenance of the *gurdwara* and its *langar*. The Maharaja had given revenue-free lands to most of the historical *gurdwaras* in his kingdom. Against the customary tradition of issuing coins in the name of the ruler himself, his coins bore the name of Guru Nanak. He issued the 'Nanak Shahi' rupee and the Nanak Shahi

33. Sohan Lal Suri, *op. cit.*, Daftar III, p. 15.

34. Mian Ahmad Yar, *Shahnama Ranjit Singh* (ed. Ganda Singh), Amritsar, 1951, p. 90.

35. Ganesh Dass Badehra, *Char Bagh-i-Punjab*, 1855, ed. by Kirpal Singh, Amritsar, 1965, pp. 326-27.

36. Ali-ud-Din Mufti, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 59.

*mohar*. On one side of these coins was Guru Nanak's figure and on the other the year of striking the coin. As the tradition goes, once his Prime Minister Dhian Singh told the Maharaja that as he was their ruler, he should not tie a cloth round his waist like the humble servants. The Maharaja enquired, "In whose name the coin is struck?" Dhian Singh told that it was in the name of Guru Nanak. The Maharaja smilingly told that the ruler was the one in whose name the coins were struck and Ranjit Singh was only the humble servant of the Guru. Whatever the Maharaja held to be most dear was dedicated to the Guru or the *gurdwara*. The beautiful garden which he laid out in Amritsar was named Ram Bagh after the fourth Guru, Ram Das Sahib and the fort constructed by him at Amritsar was named Gobindgarh after the name of Guru Gobind Singh. Tradition has it that he sent to the Golden Temple a most beautiful canopy which he had received as a gift from the Nizam of Hyderabad in 1826 saying that he was not worthy of sitting under it and it befitted the Guru's Durbar alone. It was preserved in the *toshakhana* of the Golden Temple till 1984 when it was reduced to ashes during the Blue Star Operation. General Gordon writes<sup>37</sup> that the Maharaja regarded all his victories as favours bestowed upon him by the Guru. Whenever he won a victory in the field, he would say, "This victory is granted to me by the true Guru." He so often used to say, "The Guru's hand of protection is over Ranjit Singh's head."

Murray, contemporary visitor to the Maharaja's court, writes, "It is not uncommon practice of Ranjit Singh when he contemplates any serious undertaking to direct two slips of papers to be placed on the *Granth Sahib* or sacred volume of the Sikhs. On one is written his wish and on the other the reverse. A little boy is then brought in and told to bring one of the slips, and whichever it may happen to be, His Highness is satisfied as if it were a voice of heaven."<sup>38</sup>

According to Osborne who visited the Maharaja in 1838, "He was a devout believer in the doctrines and punctual observer of ceremonies of his religion (Sikhism). The *Granth*, the sacred Book of the Sikhs, was constantly read to him and he must have been familiar with the moral precepts it inculcated."<sup>39</sup>

The Maharaja had an ardent desire to meet a Sikh who might have

37. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

38. Prinsep, *op. cit.*, appendix by Murray, p. 194.

39. Osborne, *op. cit.*, pp. xli-xlii.

seen Guru Gobind Singh with his own eyes. After a long search an old Sikh who was more than hundred years old was discovered and brought into the presence of the Maharaja. He was joyed to meet a person who was so fortunate as to cast his eyes on the holy Guru's face. The Maharaja smeared his forehead with the dust of the Sikh's feet. The old Sikh was sent back with rich gifts.

Persons enjoying the veneration of the Sikh *panth* were highly respected by the Maharaja. According to Griffin, Bhai Ram Singh had great influence with him and during a campaign his tent was regularly pitched next to that of the Maharaja.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Baba Sahib Singh Bedi's opinion weighed much with him, "who sometimes sent a request to Babaji to honour him with his sacred *darshan* (sight).<sup>41</sup> Sahib Singh Bhangi saved Gujrat from an onslaught and its conquest by Ranjit Singh through the intervention of the Sahib Singh Bedi.<sup>42</sup>

The Maharaja did not rule in his own name or in the name of his family or *misal*. He wielded power in the name of the Khalsa. "In the early days Ranjit Singh liked to be addressed by the plain and simple title of "Singh Sahib"—a title applicable to any member of the Sikh gentry. The old Sikh Chiefs even addressed him occasionally as "brother."<sup>43</sup> He always felt that he was holding that office through the Guru's kindness before whom he bowed as his servant. He considered himself to be the *kukar* (dog) at the door of the Guru and the *panth*. The Maharaja would often proclaim himself to nothing more than the mere drum (*Ranjit nigara*) of Guru Gobind Singh.

He never arrogated to himself any high-sounding titles but, on the contrary, adopted the impersonal title of Sarkar,<sup>44</sup> denoting the government responsible for law and order. The princes were addressed as Khalsa Kharak Singh, Khalsa Sher Singh and Khalsa Nauniha Singh. This shows the Maharaja's attachment to his religion. In referring to his government he always used the terms Khalsaji or Sarkar-i-Khalsa as he felt that he was the founder of a kingdom which derived its legitimacy from the Khalsa Commonwealth. All his diplomatic correspondence was carried on in the name of the Khalsa. The official form of

40. Lepel Griffin, *Ranjit Singh*, Oxford, 1905, p. 130.

41. Sohan Lal Suri, *op. cit.*, III, p. 212.

42. Amar Nath, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

43. Waheed-ud-Din, *op. cit.*, p. 29; cf. Amar Nath, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

44. Amar Nath, *op. cit.*, p. 16.



salutation in the whole of the state army was, '*Wahe Guru ji ka Khalsa, Wahe Guru ji ki Fateh*'—the Khalsa belonged to the Lord and victory also belonged to Him. All official oath-taking ceremonies were performed in the presence of the holy Book—*The Guru Granth Sahib*.

#### **Tolerant and Magnanimous**

Ranjit Singh realised from the beginning of his political career that he had been invited by the representatives of different sections of people to rule over men of different religious persuasions and practices, it was incumbent upon him to follow a cosmopolitan policy and to draw his officials from the different communities of the country. The policy of government adopted and followed by him was to place all his subjects on the same political level regardless of their faith or religion. The policy and conduct of Ranjit Singh towards the non-Sikh subjects were guided by the ideas of paternalism, liberalism and benevolence. It is not correct to say that the Maharaja's solicitude for all people, irrespective of caste, colour or creed, was rooted in any conception of the secular state. The notion of a secular state as we understand it today was alien to Ranjit Singh. His approach was religious (not communal) and not the non-religious one which is an indispensable condition or qualification of the modern theory of the secular state.<sup>45</sup>

The key posts in the Maharaja's civil and military administration were held by the people belonging to different communities such as Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and Christians. His principal criteria in selecting them were merit, suitability and loyalty. Caste, creed and nationality carried no weight with him.

The non-sectarian nature of the Maharaja's government is clearly evident from his appointments. The Dogra brothers, Dhian Singh, Gulab Singh and Suchet Singh, held high ranking posts in the Lahore Darbar; the three Faqir brothers, Aziz-ud-Din, Nur-ud-Din and Imam-ud-Din, held the posts of ministers and governors. Diwans Bhiwani Das, Ganga Ram and Dina Nath held charge of the revenue and finance departments. Mian Ghaus Khan and then Missar Diwan Chand were appointed chief officers of the artillery department. Diwan Mohkam

45. Technically speaking a secular state is one which is neutral in religious matters and officially does not give patronage to any religion. This term cannot apply to Ranjit Singh who aligned himself to a particular religion and a community and called his government the government of that community.

Chand was held in high esteem for his military skill and soldierly qualities. No ruler of ancient or medieval Indian history could match Ranjit Singh in his cosmopolitan approach who had appointed to important posts more than sixty persons, hailing from more than a dozen foreign nationalities. For example, Josiah Harlan, the governor of Gujrat, was a citizen of United States of America ; Avitabile, governor of Wazirabad, was an Italian, and army general Ventura belonged to Italy and Allard and Court hailed from France. Similarly people from Greece, Russia, Germany, Austria, England, Spain, etc., were also in his employ.

Faqir Waheed-ud-Din a descendant of Faqir family, basing his information on his family records, writes that among the top-ranking Muslim officers of the Maharaja, there were two ministers, one governor and several district officers. There were forty one high-ranking Muslim officers in the Durbar, two of them generals, several of them colonels and the rest holding other important ranks. There were as many as ninety two Muslims who held the posts of senior officers in police, judiciary, legal department and in the supply and store departments. "Thus while the ruler was a Sikh, the government was run by an elite corps composed of members of all communities. This gave Ranjit Singh's regime the character of a secular system of government."<sup>46</sup>

The manner in which the brave and staunch Mohammadans had reconciled themselves to the sway of Ranjit Singh, a Sikh, points to the most creditable features of the policy that the Maharaja followed.<sup>47</sup> He was very considerate in dealing with the Muslim chiefs. his treatment of Nizam-ud-Din of Qasur, whom he defeated more than once, gives ample proof of his generosity and toleration. His treatment of the family of the Nawab of Multan was another instance and the same can be multiplied. The Muslim women, Bibi Moran and Gul Bahar Begum whom he had married, retained their faith. Gul Bahar Begum built for the Muslims, at state expense, a mosque which is still extant.<sup>48</sup> The Maharaja patronised centres of higher learning irrespective of the people that were running the institutions or receiving instruction. There was an institute for Arabic and Persian studies in the Bazar-i-Hakiman, Lahore, which received aid from the Maharaja in the shape of

46. Waheed-ud-Din, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

47. Thornton, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 198.

48. Waheed-ud-Din, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

donations and stipends for the poor students.

Full respect was shown to the religion of Hindus also and the people holding the highest jobs in his government, like the Dogra Brothers, the Missars and others strictly adhered to their Hindu forms of religion.<sup>49</sup> The Maharaja entrusted the talented Hindus with jobs of very high responsibilities of the state. Diwan Mohkam Chand, Missar Diwan Chand and Ram Dayal worked as top-ranking military officers. Diwan Sawan Mal and Diwan Moti Ram were two of his best provincial governors. The Hindu wives of the Maharaja continued to worship their own gods and temples were erected for their use.<sup>50</sup> Ranjit Singh visited Hardwar on the Ganges and Jawala Mukhi<sup>51</sup> in the Shivaliks and presented hundreds and thousands of rupees and precious articles to the Hindu priests or Brahmans there. The temple of Jawalaji and Kangraji were the objects of Ranjit Singh's special veneration. "The golden roofs of both the large and small buildings (of Jawalamuki temple) are most tastefully and richly executed, and were the gift of Ranjit Singh."<sup>52</sup>

Jacquemont writes that during the Maharaja's time the fanaticism of the Sikhs had become extinct and tolerance of Ranjit Singh was so great that all were equal in the good grace of the Sikh monarch.<sup>53</sup> He followed completely a non-communal, and a liberal policy throughout his career. During his expeditions even non-Sikhs did their best to achieve glories for the Maharaja. The colours of Lahore Durbar were carried out by Colonel Shaikh Bassawan's Muslim troops into foreign lands. The Dogra Zorawar Singh led his forces, under the colours of the Durbar, across the Himalayas. It was because of this policy of Ranjit Singh that, after his death when the Khalsa stood up against the double menace of British machinations and the intrigues of the chiefs of the Lahore Durbar and when it was compelled to take up arms against the armies of the British, men of all the communities, Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims, fought shoulder to shoulder and ungrudgingly mingled their blood in defence of their beloved state.

49. M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 242.

50. *Lahore Gazetteer*, 1893-94, p. 29.

51. Amar Nath, *op. cit.*, pp. 97, 165; M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 156, 171; Sohan Lal Suri, *op. cit.*, III, Part V, p. 107.

52. Baron Hugel, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

53. Jacquemont, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 19-20; cf. Amar Nath, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

### Illiterate but Patron of Learning

As a young boy Ranjit Singh was sent to Bhagu Singh's Dharmshala at Gujranwala to get education in Gurmukhi.<sup>54</sup> Since he had no interest in education he grew up as an illiterate youngman. In those days of chivalry manly sports, warlike qualities and dexterity in the use of arms, horse-riding, hunting, swimming, etc., were considered adequate for a prince and Ranjit Singh was fully adept in these arts and practices. In the medieval period the lack of formal education did not stand in the way of a ruler. Many great Indian rulers like Ala-ud-Din Khalji, Akbar and Shivaji were totally unlettered. "Ranjit Singh's destiny had denied him a formal education ; but his illiteracy was counter balanced by a sharp inquisitive mind and a subtle genius and intuition with which he mastered state-craft and conducted official business."<sup>55</sup> All state documents and petitions of the people were read out to him and he gave immediate verbatim orders to draft a reply as instructed by him. The final drafts were presented to him for approval and where he felt necessary he made alterations orally.

"With an accurate and retentive memory and with great fertility of both invention and resource, he was an excellent man of business without being able to write or even to read."<sup>56</sup> He had deep comprehension into the affairs of the state. He would personally audit the accounts presented by the officers of the *parganas* and the various departments of the Central Government. He would slash the unnecessary expenditures and sometimes suggest simple methods of preparing statements of income and expenditure. With his quick and searching eye nothing could escape his notice.

He was gifted with prodigious memory. He could at once recognise a person once seen a decade earlier. He remembered the names of thousands of the villages of his state and those of the important persons of those villages along with the government officials working therein.<sup>57</sup>

Despite the fact that the Maharaja was an illiterate person he was

54. Bute Shah, *Tawarikh-i-Punjab*, Daftar V, manuscript Dr Ganda Singh, private collection, Patiala, p. 8.

55. B.J. Hasrat, *Life and Times of Ranjit Singh*, Hoshiarpur, 1977, p. 192.

56. Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. XL.

57. Ganesh Das, *op. cit.*, p. 326 ; H. M. L. Lawrence, *Adventures of an officer in the Panjab in the service of Ranjit Singh*, London, 1846, Vol. I, p. 31.

a great patron of education and learning. He is said to have opened many schools for imparting the elementary education. He gave liberal grants to those institutions. In Ranjit Singh's time and earlier too education was never a state responsibility. The governments interested in the spread of literacy gave grants to such institutions. Ranjit Singh's Foreign Minister Faqir Aziz-ud-Din started an institution at Lahore to impart instruction in Persian and Arabic and financed from his personal resources. Hundreds of students received education in that institution. Arrangement of free boarding and lodging and books was also made for the deserving students.<sup>58</sup> But the Maharaja liberally contributed to its maintenance.

In Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time many Gurmukhi schools flourished in the big towns. Amritsar was a prominent centre of Gurmukhi learning and had many schools, including Bhai Ram Singh school and Bhai Kharak Singh Dhupia school, which were aided by the Maharaja with liberal grants.<sup>59</sup> The Maharaja was keen to encourage the study of English in his state. In 1834 the Maharaja proposed to Sobha Singh that Lehna Singh Majithia's brother Gujjar Singh be sent to England to learn English there. Ranjit Singh made arrangements for the teaching of English to Prince Sher Singh.<sup>60</sup>

In January 1835 the Maharaja invited Rev. John C. Lowrie, an American missionary, from Ludhiana to visit Lahore. The Maharaja had a special purpose in inviting Lowrie. He wanted to have an English school established at Lahore for the education of his children and those of his nobles. The negotiations with Lowrie broke down on the point that Ranjit Singh did not agree to the former's insistence on the teaching of Bible as a compulsory subject in the school. Besides a long discussion on the issue, the Maharaja put a direct question to the Christian missionary, "If the government established a school, who should decide on the branches to be taught"? The conditions for starting the English school were not acceptable to each other. The Maharaja gave Lowrie a friendly dismissal on March 5, 1835 and invested him with a *khillat*. The Maharaja sent some youngmen to Ludhiana to have the knowledge of English. A two-page supplement attached to

58. Muhammad Lattif, *History of Lahore*, Lahore, 1892, pp. 338-39.

59. Leitner, *History of Indigenous Education in the Punjab since annexation*, Calcutta, 1882, pp. 150, 180.

60. Sita Ram Kohli, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh* (Punjabi), Delhi, 1953, pp. 327-28.

*Akhbar Ludhiana*, issue No. 111, dated February, 1837,<sup>61</sup> regarding the school at Ludhiana, had a list of the students on the rolls of the school published class-wise along with their native places. From the list we find many students, getting English education, belonging to the Punjab towns of Lahore, Bhatinda, Jullundur, etc., besides students from Qandhar, Kabul, Peshawar, Kashmir, Patna, Calcutta, Meerut, Delhi and Kanpur. According to Carmichael Smyth, Prime Minister Dhiyan Singh's son Hira Singh had a sufficient knowledge of English, Persian and Sanskrit.<sup>62</sup> Many children of the nobles of Lahore were encouraged to learn English from the European employees of Lahore Durbar. Besides the Punjabi poets like Hasham and Shah Mohammad, chroniclers of Lahore Kingdom like Sohan Lal Suri and Diwan Amar Nath received rich patronage at the hands of the Maharaja. All these things go a long way to establish that Ranjit Singh, though uneducated himself, was keenly anxious to promote education in his state.

#### Pre-eminently Inquisitive

The unlettered sovereign of the Sikhs possessed an unabated eagerness for information from all those who happened to come into contact with him. He had a variety of interests including a large number of subjects ranging from war to wine, from princes to paupers, from guns to shoeing of horses, from heaven to hell and goodness to evil. With foreign visitors he was particularly communicative and familiar. He would smash the foreign travellers with a volley of questions. Baron Hugel writes, "During my first audience with the Maharaja, I was subjected to an examination for a whole hour without one instant's intermission to put a single question in return."<sup>63</sup>

The French traveller Jacquemont who had the privilege of meeting the Maharaja many a time at Lahore writes, "His (Ranjit Singh's) conversation is a nightmare. He is almost the first inquisitive Indian I have seen but his curiosity makes up for apathy for his whole nation. He asked me a hundred thousand questions about India, the English, Europe, Bonaparte, this world in general and other one, hell and paradise, the soul, God, the devil and a myriad of others of the same

61. These newspapers (in Persian) are preserved in Dr Ganda Singh's private collection at Patiala.

62. Carmichael Smyth, *A History of the Reigning Family of Lahore*, Calcutta, 1847, p. 262.

63. Baron Hugel, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

kind”<sup>64</sup> Many others like Fane and Osborne, who saw Ranjit Singh from a very close quarter, testify to this overwhelming curiosity of the Maharaja. Sometimes he pretended to be a seeker of information and he would confuse the other person with an infinite variety of subjects with ceaseless rapidity. When Colonel Bellasis, seeking service, was summoned to the Durbar for an interview the Maharaja flooded him with numerous questions. When Bellasis told that he was capable of doing every thing and was ignorant of nothing the Maharaja asked him in a single breath, “Can you build a fort? Can you cure a long standing disease? Can you cast a gun? Can you shoe a horse? Can you mend my watch which has stopped?”<sup>65</sup>

Osborne, who visited Lahore in 1838, complained that most of his time was occupied in Ranjit Singh’s innumerable questions which flowed with insatiable curiosity. The following dialogue would display his inquisitiveness and political astuteness :

The Maharaja : How many troops have you got in this country altogether ?

Osborne : About two hundred thousand.

The Maharaja : So, I have been told ; but you could not bring that number into the field at once, or at any one place.

Osborne : Certainly not; it is unnecessary. Twenty, or at the most thirty thousand British troops could march from one end of India to the other, and no power in the country could stop them.

The Maharaja : You are fine fellow; how many Frenchmen can Englishman beat ?

Osborne : At school in England, the boys are always taught to consider themselves equal to three Frenchmen.

The Maharaja : How many Russians ?

Osborne : The French beat the Russians and we beat the French.

The Maharaja : If the Russians cross the Indus, what force could you bring against them ?

Osborne : Quite enough to drive them back with your Highness for an ally.

The Maharaja : Wah ! Wah ! So we will.<sup>66</sup>

64. Jacquemont, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 396.

65. Lawrence, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 20.

66. Osborne, *op. cit.*, ed. 1952, p. 40.

During Macnaughten's Mission to the Maharaja's court in 1838 he put a number of searching questions to the British envoy: "What number of troops the Emperor of Russia keeps in his pay? Are they good soldiers? Can the English beat them? What number of men could they bring across the Indus? What would you do if they were actually to attempt an invasion? Do you wish them to come? Have they much money? Then there would be nothing but fighting, no plunder. Perhaps it would be better if they do not come at all."<sup>67</sup>

All the visitors to the Maharaja's court were deeply impressed by his inquisitiveness and the rapidity with which the questions flowed from his lips.

#### **Some other Personal Traits of the Maharaja**

Ranjit Singh was known for fearlessness and intrepidity. Right from the beginning of his career he had been courting dangers and hazardous situations. When he was not participating in fighting and was just watching the performance of his soldiers, finding his men losing heart, he would immediately jump into the thick of fighting quite unmindful of any danger to his life. Very often he exposed himself to grave personal risks but his presence of mind and a high spirit of a bravery saved him from such situations. He always rewarded and publicly honoured such men as exhibited acts of exemplary valour.

According to Gordon the Maharaja possessed great power of endurance, he was given to long journeys on horse-back, surprise visits to distant parts of his dominions enabling him to check his governors in their reports as to revenue and other matters. He managed better than others more learned, to transact the current duties of his state by means of his retentive memory, quickness of mind and keen observation. His court was brilliant with oriental pageantry, but personally he was free from pomp and show and so scrupulously simple in his dress among his gorgeously clad Sardars as to be distinguished.<sup>68</sup>

Maharaja had a proverbial love for horses. He is said to have one thousand saddle horses for his personal use. His feudatories and foreign governments including that of England sent him horses as gifts and tokens of goodwill. His favourite horses were always kept ready

67. *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

68. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 112.



near his camp. There are many stories about the famous steed Leili, for the possession of which the Maharaja sent an army to Peshawar and had to do a severe fighting there. The Maharaja told Baron Hugel that Leili had cost him 60,00,000 rupees and 12,000 soldiers.<sup>69</sup>

He was fond of drinking, and enjoying dance. He had engaged a number of *natch* girls always ready in his palace to provide him with fun and amusement. He made no secret of his love for wine and beauty. Such weaknesses do not behove a king but these were the vices of the age rather than that of Ranjit Singh alone. It is likely that at times the Maharaja indulged in them excessively.

Ranjit Singh was a man of remarkable intelligence, commendable self-restraint and rare sagacity. Habitually he was reserved in official matters but he would joke with foreign visitors and when outside his court he was very free in talk even with the ordinary people. He possessed indefatigable capacity for work and even minute points regarding administration received his attention. Perhaps he was the busiest man in his state.

Captain Wade has given a description of Ranjit Singh's daily routine as he noted it during his visit to Lahore in 1831. According to him the Maharaja used to go out at about 5 a.m. and spend an hour or two in riding and inspecting his troops, and took his first meal often on horse-back. He returned to his residence at about 9 a.m. and held his court where he received reports, issued orders to his officers and examined the financial accounts of his government. At noon he took rest for an hour, his secretary always by his side to write from his dictation. At about 1 p.m. he got up and after hearing some hymns from the holy *Granth* he resumed his court which continued till evening. He went to bed between 8 and 9 p.m. and a secretary still being in attendance to whom he frequently dictated orders.<sup>70</sup> And according to M'Gregor if the affairs of the state required his attention, Ranjit Singh was ready at all times during day and night and it was not at all unusual for him to order his secretary and the Prime Minister to carry the designs, on which he had been meditating during the night, into

69. Baron Hugel, *op. cit.*, p. 333.

70. *Captain Wade to the Secretary to the Governor-General*, 31st May 1831, Letter No. 45, Vol. 31, Range 126, *Bengal Political Consultations*, India Office, MSS; records; cf. Shahamat Ali, *The Sikhs and Afghans*, London, 1847, pp. 17-18, Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 42; M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 220-21.

execution before day break.<sup>71</sup>

The Maharaja was very meticulous in the discharge of his responsibilities. He would not postpone his work if it could be finished the same day.

#### As a Ruler

Ganesh Das Badehra is all praise for the administration and the stability of the Maharaja's government. According to him the Maharaja had an abundant fund of administrative ability and bravery, the two qualities rarely to be found in one and the same man. Sometimes he took in hand hazardous plans but he executed them efficiently. Even if he met with failure in any of his designs or expeditions, he never allowed the affairs of the state to be disturbed. He possessed a sharp and enlightened intellect and could conduct the most intricate affairs of the state with dexterity. He did not believe in blood for blood but on the complaint of the aggrieved party he resorted to mild punishment consistent with his policy to reform rather than destroy.<sup>72</sup>

Ranjit Singh possessed in a very high degree, one particular kingly quality not usually conspicuous in oriental monarchs: he always knew how far he could go. However large and far-reaching his ultimate designs must be, his immediate measures were always practicable. He always took the next step after making the first one secure. He never challenged an enemy without making sure that the result of the contest would be in his favour.<sup>73</sup>

Ranjit Singh's government was not meddlesome to the extent of preventing the development of an independent character. Under his government there was ample scope of realisation of individual ambition in either military or civil government. He never based his authority upon any Divine Right Theory of Supremacy and never allowed it to grow harsh or tyrannical. Rather it may be described as kind and benevolent. Though he had established, to a large extent, a personal sway over the country and the people, yet he tried to refrain from setting up institution which might appear autocratic or despotic in form and character as he knew that the Khalsa, nurtured and brought up in the traditions of democratic equality, might seriously resent any attempt at autocratic innovation. It is incumbent upon the sovereign

71. M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 220.

72. Ganesh Das, *op. cit.*, p. 329.

73. Charles Gough and Arthur D. Innes, *The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars*, London, 1897, p. 29.

to look after his territories well, give due protection to his subjects from external and internal dangers, stabilise his government through law and discipline and make personal sacrifices to promote well-being of the subjects. And Ranjit Singh discharged all these obligations with amazing efficiency and consideration.

Ranjit Singh sums up his own achievements as a ruler in the following words quoted by H. M. L. Lawrence.

"By generosity, discipline and policy I have regulated and consolidated my government. I have rewarded the bold and encouraged merit whenever it was to be found ; on the field of battle I exalted the valiant ; with my troops I have shared all dangers, all fatigue. Both on the field and in the cabinet, I shut out partiality from my soul and closed my eyes to personal comforts, with the robe of empire I put on a mantle of care...*Shri Akal Purakhji* (Almighty God) has been merciful to this servant and increased his power, so that, his territory now extends to the borders of China and the limits of the Afghans."<sup>74</sup>

Right from the outset of his political career he kept before him the welfare of the people. When he entered Lahore on July 6, 1799 he announced by the beat of drum that all shop-keepers, bankers and artisans must go to their work without any fear and it was his job to see that no body was in any way harassed. And he should be considered their protector and watchman.<sup>75</sup> If anybody was found guilty of disturbing the peace and calm of the city, he would be suitably dealt with. This won him the love and respect of the subjects. Similarly the Maharaja did not allow people to plunder the city of Peshawar<sup>76</sup> when he conquered it in March 1824. He knew that after the conquest the town belonged to him and its inhabitants were his subjects who had every claim on his protection.

In order to know about the grievances of his subjects the Maharaja had petition-boxes placed at the palace gate and other gates of the city, accessible to everybody, and he kept the keys of these boxes in his possession. When a person wanted to have an audience with the Maharaja and found it difficult to approach him, he could, from a distance wave a piece of cloth (called *palu pherna*) to catch the attention of the Maharaja and he was called into his presence. In this way he

74. H. M. L. Lawrence, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 64-65.

75. Amar Nath, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

76. Amar Nath, *op. cit.*, p. 155; Sohan Lal Suri, *op. cit.*, II, p. 305.

acquired information which could not otherwise have reached his ears and he was able to administer justice after the necessary investigation.<sup>77</sup>

The Maharaja was a very practical man in all walks of life. He was seldom swayed by his emotions. He would never work on imaginary schemes or utopian plans. In the words of Osborne, "His success and especially the consolidation of his power is in great measure attributable to the soundness of his views and the practicable nature of his plans. He never exhausted his strength in wild and hazardous enterprises but restraining his ambition within the limits of a reasonable probability, they were not only so well-timed and skilfully arranged as generally to ensure success but failure (in the rare instances when they did fail) never seriously shook stability or impaired his resources."<sup>78</sup>

According to Lepel Griffin, "He (Ranjit Singh) was a born ruler, with the natural genius of command. Men obeyed him by instinct and because they had no power to disobey. The control which he exercised even in the closing years of his life, over the whole Sikh people, nobles, priests and people, was the measure of his greatness."<sup>79</sup> He further writes about him, "Although half a century has passed since his death, his name is still a house-hold word in the province; his portrait is still preserved in castle and cottage. It is a favourite subject with the ivory painters of Amritsar and Delhi."<sup>80</sup>

#### A Wise Statesman

The Maharaja was a very intelligent statesman. It was not easy to beat him in diplomacy. Even the most guarded and deep designs of the British could not be outside his comprehension. The treaty of Amritsar (1809) concluded with the British was a glaring act of his statesmanship. He fully knew his limitations and mighty power of the East India Company. For the whole of his life he avoided confrontation with the English like a wise statesman, even in the face of the provoking situations created by the British in respect of the affairs of Sind, Shikarpur and Ferozepur. He always took care to safeguard the interests of the state that he carved out with long-drawn, expensive, laborious and hazardous enterprises.

Ranjit Singh's policy towards North-West Frontier is clearly indi-

77. M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 288-89.

78. Osborne, *op. cit.*, pp. xL-xLi.

79. Lepel Griffin, *op. cit.*, second Indian reprint 1967, pp. 91-92.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

cative of his deep political wisdom. Even after the conquests of Peshawar, Dera Ghazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu and Kohat he did not annex them to the Lahore Durbar. He did it only after consolidating his position there. He strengthened his position in the North-West Frontier by repairing the old forts and constructing the new ones. Ranjit Singh's not invading Afghanistan reflects his statesman.

We can discern his statesmanship in his civil and military administration also. In his very early years he had discovered that the European military system was superior to that of an Indian system. So he Europeanised a major part of his army. He made appointments in his civil and military administration after an astute and searching scrutiny. He always selected the right men for the right place. He knew it full well that the Jats of Majha and Doaba constituted a class of soldiers and warriors. Therefore, he recruited them in the army and gave them high ranks there. Similarly he appointed the Hindus in the civil administration particularly in the Finance Department. In order to win the goodwill and cooperation of all the communities he appointed them in his service without any discrimination. His equal treatment with all was the result of his political acumen and wise statesmanship which had its imprint on all aspects of his administrative set-up and foreign policy. In the words of Lepel Griffin, "He yet ruled the country which his military genius had conquered with a vigour of will and ability which placed him in the front rank of the statesmen of the century."<sup>81</sup>

#### A General and Conqueror

Ranjit Singh was a brave soldier, an efficient general, an excellent horseman and an intrepid swordsman. "He would remain the whole day in the saddle without showing any sign of fatigue."<sup>82</sup> Right from his early boyhood he had been very fond of riding, hunting and using his sword. He displayed unusual bravery and swordsmanship when he killed his father's enemy Hashmat Khan Chatha who stealthily attacked him with his sword when he was out hunting. At that time he was hardly twelve. During his meeting with Lord William Bentinck at Ropar in 1831 the Maharaja at the age of 51 exhibited such feats of riding and swordsmanship as made the Governor-General and his party stunned. It was all due to his extra ordinary ability as a soldier that

81. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

he was able to expand his small Misal with a wide, powerful and well ordered and thoroughly organised kingdom. He was only ten years old when after his father Mahan Singh's return from Sodhra due to sudden illness he took command of his soldiers and defeated the Bhangis there. In the words of Lepel Griffin Ranjit Singh "was the *beau ideal* of a soldier, strong, spare, active, courageous and enduring."<sup>83</sup>

Ranjit Singh conquered Lahore in 1799 and during the next decade conquered and consolidated almost all the Misals in the trans-Satluj area excepting the Ahluwalia Misal. He also conquered Multan, Kashmir, Attock, Peshawar and Derajat. No doubt, most of his conquests were made by his army officers like Mohkam Chand, Diwan Chand, Hari Singh Nalwa, etc., but in many incursions he also himself participated. "In battle he was always seen at the head of his troops and foremost in combat; he twice crossed the Indus with his cavalry, in the face of the enemy and gained the victory. In energy of will, and endurance he was unequalled by any of his people."<sup>84</sup> In the words of M'Gregor, "He was ever the foremost in battle and the last in retreat, there is no instance of his being embarrassed or evincing anything like fear on record."<sup>85</sup> The entire planning regarding the expeditions, their preparations and operations was done by the Maharaja himself. "A good general...he was more conspicuous in the organisational than in the operational part of campaigns"<sup>86</sup> With the coming of Ventura and Allard in 1822 in the Maharaja's service many reforms were introduced in the army and the army was modernised to a large extent. Many big guns were cast. Regular training and parade was introduced in the army and strict discipline was enforced in its ranks. "Having learnt the value of discipline, he was seized with the desire to possess a disciplined army, and is well-known, was not content with idly desiring it but using all means available for effecting his purpose, at length saw himself at the head of a force such as no eastern power had ever before possessed."<sup>87</sup>

He strengthened himself militarily and extended the boundaries of his state with the help of his strong army. It would have been so easy for him to go up to Delhi if the Treaty of 1809 had not put a restraint on

83. *Ibid.*

84. Orlich, *Travels in India*, Vol. I, London, 1845, p. 171.

85. M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 215-216.

86. N.K. Sinha, *Ranjit Singh*, 2nd edition, Calcutta, 1945, p. 188.

87. Carmichael Smyth, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

his crossing river Satluj. "He possessed the same grand creative genius as Sivaji and Hyder Ali had. It was his extraordinary talent alone which reared the edifice of Sikh greatness, and if had not been hemmed in by the irresistible power of the company he would undoubtedly have established a new and magnificent empire in Hindustan."<sup>88</sup> His powers in the battle field was beyond question. The shrewdness of his judgement and the promptitude of action were so eminently manifest in situations fraught with dangers. Whenever opportunity came his way he caught it from its forelocks. If there had been no Englishmen in India during Ranjit Singh's time who could prevent him from becoming the master of the whole country? "The Maharaja was indeed one of those master-minds which only require opportunity to change the face of the globe. Ranjit Singh made a great and powerful nation from the dis-united confederacies of the Sikhs, and would have carried his conquests to Delhi or even further had it not been for the simultaneous rise and consolidation of the British empire in India."<sup>89</sup>

#### Place in History

Ranjit Singh has been likened to many historical personages as Sher Shah Suri, Napoleon, Bismarck, Abraham Lincoln, Shivaji, Haider Ali, etc. In fact, a person cannot be compared reasonably to another person so long as the circumstances of both were not similar. The circumstances under which Ranjit Singh carved his way to a kingdom were more unfavourable than those faced by most of the above mentioned great men of history. The Indian rulers as referred to above had a fight only against the Mughals but Ranjit Singh created a big state despite the opposition and hostile attitude of the Marathas, the British, the Afghans and the Sikh Chiefs of the various Misals of the Punjab. He was a great conqueror who got liberated permanently the North-West Frontier of the Punjab from the control of Afghanistan.

He gave a very efficient administration to the people and united the scattered and divided portions of the Punjab into a strong and well-welded kingdom. He reorganised his army on the western style and transformed it into an invulnerable force to reckon with. He was a statesman par excellence. He exhibited a wonderful grasp of the political and military situations confronting him. Undoubtedly Ranjit Singh was the last great constructive genius among the Sikhs.

88. Marshman, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 152.

89. Hugh Pearse, *Soldier and Traveller : Memoirs of Alexander Gardner*, p. 180.

## Maharaja Ranjit Singh : His Character and Achievements

HARCHARAN SINGH\*

The Sikh power in the Punjab rose in the wake of invasions of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali which shattered the already tottering edifice of the Mughal empire. It was after Ahmad Shah's last invasion in 1766-67, that the Sikhs settled down<sup>1</sup> in different areas on both sides of the Sutlej in groups or formations known as the *misls*. The Sikhs would have become as formidable and irresistible in the North India as the Marathas in the South and West. But the democratic nature of the Sikh faith, resisted all attempts at dictation by one control authority, until Maharaja Ranjit Singh broke down all opposition and reduced rivals and enemies to a common obedience.

Ranjit Singh, the only son of Sardar Mahan Singh, was in his twelfth year when his father died. The onus of conducting the affairs of Sukerchakia confederacy fell on her mother, Mai Malwain, assisted by her minister, Dewan Lakhpat Rai, during the minority of her son. Little care had been bestowed on the early education of Ranjit Singh. He was never taught to read and write.<sup>2</sup> On attaining the age of seventeen he took upon himself the sole responsibility of the *misl*. From now onward Ranjit Singh laboured with more or less of intelligent design to give unity and coherence to diverse atoms and scattered elements to mould the Sikh nation into a well ordered state or commonwealth.

On July 7, 1799 Ranjit Singh occupied<sup>3</sup> Lahore on the invitation of its inhabitants and on April 12, 1801 Maharajaship was conferred<sup>4</sup> on him by Baba Sahib Singh Bedi. But he claimed no royalty for him-

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\* Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh.

1. Steinbach, *The Punjab*, London, 1846, p. 12.
2. Henry T. Prinsep, *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab*, Calcutta, 1834, p. 141.
3. G. Carmichael Smyth, *A History of the Reigning Family of Lahore*, Calcutta, 1847, p. 17.
4. Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh, First Death Centenary Volume*, Amritsar, 1939, p. 19.



self. To him Guru was *Sacha Padshah*, the Real King, and considered himself His humble servant deputed for the service of the people. He was only contented being addressed as *Sarkar*. His official seal bore the inscription 'Akal Sahai Ranjit Singh.' His Nanakshahi coins bore the following inscription :<sup>5</sup>

*Degh o Tegh o Fateh Nusrat Bedrang  
Yaft Az Nanak Guru Gobind Singh.*

After Jaipal lost his kingdom in the Punjab to Sultan Mahmud Ghazni in 1001 A. D. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was the first Indian ruler to revive native rule in this part of the country. He built the scattered land of Punjab into a strong kingdom. He wrested from Kabul the fairest of its provinces, and he gave the potent English no cause for interference. He found the military array of his country a mass of horsemen, though brave but ignorant of war as an art. And he left it mustering fifty thousand disciplined soliders, fifty thousand well-armed yeomanry and militia, and more than three hundred pieces of cannon for the field.<sup>6</sup> The territorial possessions of Ranjit Singh comprised the entire fork of the Punjab, as bounded by the Indus and Sutlej, the two extreme rivers. He held besides Kashmir, and the entire hill country to the snowy range and even Ladak beyond the "Himalaya."<sup>7</sup>

A great commander as he was, he was a great administrator as well. In his council of ministers he had brilliant men of various communities. In making appointments to the army commands of governorship or even the most responsible posts in the ministry he never discriminated between Hindus, Muslims, Christians, etc. Several of the most trusted of the Maharaja's ministers were Mohammedan conspicuous among them being Faqir Aziz-ud-Din<sup>8</sup> and Faqir Nur-ud-Din. Numerous Brahmins such as Jamadar Khushal Singh,<sup>9</sup> Raja Tej Singh, Raja Sahib Dial, Raja Rallia Ram, and Dewan Ayodhya

5, *Ibid.*, p. 20.

6. J. D. Cunningham, *A History of the Sikhs*, Reprint, Delhi, 1966, p. 200.

7. Henry T. Prinsep, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

8. He was one of the most honoured and trusted servants of Ranjit Singh. He was always consulted and invariably made the medium of communication with the British authorities.

9. A Brahmin from near Saharanpur, he was the first who rose to distinction and was enlisted in one of the first raised regiments,

Prashad, etc., also found prominent place in his Darbar. He conferred the governorship of Multan on the discreet Sawan Mal and rewarded the military talents of Hari Singh Nalwa. Sardar Desa Singh Majithia enjoyed the Maharaja's esteem and confidence as governor of Amritsar and of the Jullundur Doab. He received into his service several French and Italian officers. Of all the generals of the Maharaja, Diwan Mohkam Chand, a Khatri, was perhaps the ablest.<sup>10</sup>

Ranjit Singh was not cruel or blood thirsty. After a victory or the capture of a fortress he treated the vanquished with leniency and kindness, however, stout their resistance might have been. He never ordered an execution, either in the way of punishment or revange.<sup>11</sup> He gave to his subjects a more consistent and uniform system of administration and greater amount of peace and prosperity than they had enjoyed for over a century.

Maharaja was truly a religious man. Every day after taking bath he would say his morning prayer; put on his dress and arms and would present himself before the Holy *Guru Granth Sahib* where with great concentration of mind he would hear *kirtan* and recitation of *bani*. So great was his faith in the *Granth Sahib* that he never took any big decision or launched upon any important undertaking without seeking its guidance. On the *sakranti* day every month he visited Amritsar in thanks giving at Darbar Sahib. Then a *tuladan* was performed and money, gold, silver, elephants, cows and horses were given in charity. On Diwali day a great *tuladan* was held when the Maharaja was weighed in gold which was distributed among the needy and deserving. He was neither a zealot nor a bigot. His difference for the religious feelings of the Hindus and Muslims was no less than his love for his own religion. He visited the shrines of the Muslim saints and Hindu temples and gave donations, jagirs and presents with equal generosity. When he annexed Lahore in 1799, he restored Sunehri Masjid built by Nawab Bukhari Khan to the Muslims. By donating 22 *maunds* of gold to the Visvanath temple of Benares he won the hearts of Hindus. A total of 45 lakhs rupees in cash, gold and silver were distributed<sup>12</sup> in charity to holy men and shrines belonging to different faiths on the

10. Bingley, A. H., *Sikhs*, Calcutta, 1918, p. 23.

11. H. M. L. Lawrence, *Some Passages in the Life of an Adventurer in the Punjab*, Vol. II, Delhi, 1842, p. 15.

12. Bikramajit Hasrat, *Life and Times of Ranjit Singh*, Nabha, 1977, p. 187.

day of his demise.

Wholly illiterate, but gifted with great natural intelligence and a wonderfully quick apprehension and retentive memory, he managed<sup>13</sup> better than those more learned to transact the business of his kingdom. Every foreign visitor to his court was struck with his intelligence, eager curiosity and general information. He would often discuss the manners and constitutions of other countries and hear about the armies and campaigns of Europe. His manners to strangers were particularly pleasing and courteous and many accounts are extant by travellers who visited Lahore during the later years of his reign which attest the fascination he exercised over those in immediate relation to him.

An excellent horseman, he would remain the whole day in the saddle without showing any sign of fatigue. His love for horses amounted to passion. He used to say that where he felt surest of himself was in the saddle, and so he often took important decisions on horseback. He maintained an enormous stud for his personal use collected from every part of India, Arabia and Persia. The famous Persian horse Leili cost him sixty lakhs of rupees and twelve thousand men.<sup>14</sup> He was also a keen sportsman and an accomplished swordsman. At Ropar in 1831 he competed with his own troopers and these of Skinder's Horse in tent pagging and feats of swordsmanship.

He was great because he possessed in an extraordinary degree the qualities without which the highest success cannot be attained. To the highest courage he added perserverance which no obstacle could exhaust and he did not fail in his understanding because he never admitted the possibility of failure. He was a born ruler with natural genius of command. Men obeyed<sup>15</sup> him by instinct and because they had no power to disobey. The control which he exercised even in the closing years of his life, over the whole population, nobles, priests and people, was the measure of his greatness. He ruled the country which his military genius had conquered with vigour of will, and an ability which placed him in the front rank of the statesmen of the country. Upto the last Ranjit Singh acted as if for him there could be no death.

13. H. M. L. Lawrence, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

14. Baron-Charles Hugel, *Travels in Cashmere and the Punjab*, London, 1845, p.

15. Lepel Griffin, *Ranjit Singh*, Delhi, 1977, p. 91.

He made no preparation for the continuance of order, and as a consequence, when he died the fabric built and held together for forty years by his genius, collapsed from the inherent weakness of its construction.<sup>16</sup> Yet he ranks amongst those, whose means have been the least exceptionable, his career being stained by no bloody executions, and by much fewer crimes, than are chargeable against founders of dynasties.<sup>17</sup>

Ranjit Singh's achievements cannot be better described than in his own words : "My kingdom is a great kingdom : it was small, it is now large; it was scattered, broken, and divided; it is now consolidated; it must increase in prosperity and descend undivided to my posterity. The maxims of Taimur have guided me; what he professed, and ordered I have done. By counsel and providence, combined with valour, I have conquered; and by generosity, discipline, and policy, I have regulated and consolidated my government. I have rewarded the bold, and encouraged merit wherever it was to be found ; on the field of battle, I exalted the valiant; with my troops I have shared all dangers, all fatigues. Both on the field and in the cabinet, I shut out partiality from my soul, and closed my eyes to personal comforts ; with the robe of empire, I put on a mantle of care : I fed faqirs and holy men, and gained their prayers ; the guilty as the innocent I spared ; and those whose hands were raised against myself have met my clemency : *Sri Akal Purakhji* (Almighty God) has, therefore, been merciful to this servant, and increased his power, so that, his territory now extends to the borders of China and the limits of the Afghans, with all Multan and the rich possessions beyond the Sutlej."<sup>18</sup>

16. S. S. Thorburn, *The Punjab in Peace and War*, London, 1904, p. 23.

17. Henry T. Prinsep, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

18. H. M. L. Lawrence, *Adventures of an Officer in the Punjab*, vol. I, London, 1846, pp. 64-65.

## Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Conquest of Multan— A Study of His Strategy and Diplomacy

SHIV KUMAR GUPTA\*

Ranjit Singh was not only a great ruler and a shrewd diplomat but also a great general. His father, Mahan Singh, the chief of the Shukerchakia *misal*, left him in 1792 at the head of a small confederacy and a small body of Sikh cavalry, very little superior to that of the neighbouring chieftains.<sup>1</sup> But the young Sardar had a will to unite Punjab under him, nay, even to go beyond it. It was with this mission that he embarked upon a career of conquests. To realise his dream, firstly he came out to reduce the Sikh Chiefs one by one. In this scheme, he was even able to outwit the Bhangi Sardars and became the master of Lahore and Amritsar in 1799 and 1805 respectively. With these two conquests Ranjit Singh emerged as the 'Maharaja' among his equals.

Treaty of Amritsar, 1809, gave Ranjit Singh many anxious moments for it stood in the way of realisation of his dream of a united Punjab under him. But soon he was able to control his senses. Damned on his south-eastern frontier, Ranjit Singh's irreparable energy soon found an outlet elsewhere. Feeling safe in that quarter, he now came out "to direct his whole force in other directions where he had yet many enemies to overcome, and to pursue his policy of reducing to subjugation all Sardars and Mohammadan chiefs within his kingdom having any pretensions to independence and power."<sup>2</sup> Hence he determined to extend his rule towards the north-west. First to fall his prey was Multan.

Situated at the junction of two rivers, the Sutlej and the Ravi, it was very important both from commercial and strategic points of view. Moreover, being on the way to Qandhar, it served as an entrepot of trade and commerce for the Punjab, Sindh, Afghanistan and Central

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1. N. K. Sinha, *Ranjit Singh*, Calcutta, 1933, p. 1.

2. J. H. Gordon, *The Sikhs*, reprint, Patiala, 1970, p. 95.

Asia. Many conquerors, even Taimur, took the Multan route to reach the heart of Hindustan.

During the Mughal days, it was also the capital of a province after that name. It was conquered by Afghans towards the decline of Mughal empire. In 1771 this city fell to the Bhangi Sardars. But in 1779 Taimur Shah, the successor of Ahmad Shah Abdali, ousted the Bhangi Sardars and appointed Muzaffar Khan Sadazai as the governor. When Ranjit Singh came to power, Multan was held by this Nawab, technically a dependent of Afghan ruler but practically independent of every external control. It took Ranjit Singh not much time to realise that it was not safe to allow it to continue as an independent entity because of its being nominally though, under the suzerainty of Kabul. Moreover, it was in order to consolidate his kingdom to expell the lingering Durani forces from Punjab that Ranjit Singh embarked upon the conquest of Multan. Hence he set his heart on its subjugation and occupation right from the beginning of his career.

Though without any formal education, Ranjit Singh had acquired a certain degree of expertise in the art of warfare. An in-depth study of his conquest of Multan clearly brings out that he understood war in all its manifestation. He had a full grasp of military strategy, tactics and principles of war, which he applied in a masterly manner to his advantage.

The fighting technique in a battle has two main aspects, strategy and tactics. Strategy is a method by which a commander seeks to bring his army to the battle, while tactics are the means by which he seeks to defeat his enemy in the battle. A survey of his conquest of Multan leaves us in no doubt that Ranjit was a past-master of both aspects of the fighting technique.

Ranjit Singh preferred a strategy of subtle accomodation of small gains.<sup>3</sup> He was never in a hurry with regard to the conquests beyond Punjab. In fact, "A striking feature of Ranjit Singh's strategy was his adroit use of expediency. He was no adventurer, no rash leader and was not prepared to take any but the very careful calculated risks. Whenever and wherever he found any stiff resistance, instead of meeting it with promptness, he usually adopted the policy of temporisation and laying in wait for a better opportunity. Ranjit Singh "used to ascertain whether it was going to be an easy conquest for him

3. Fauja Singh, *Military System of the Sikhs, 1799-1849*, Delhi, 1964, p. 313.

or a difficult one. If easy he would not mind embarking upon the idea of conquest, if difficult, he used to make all out efforts to find out the possibilities, means strategy and diplomacy to be adopted."<sup>4</sup>

Adaptability is yet another notable trait of his character. Annexation was usually not insisted upon at the initial stage, but on the contrary was put off until the situation was fully ripe for it. In the meantime the whole stress was laid upon the gradual undermining of the strength of the enemy through perennial raids and realisation of repeated and ever-mounting tributes. Conquest of Multan provides a typical example of this.

Ranjit Singh invaded Multan six times before it was finally captured in 1818. Many reasons have been attributed for so much delay. Some historians attribute the delay to Ranjit Singh's generosity, as he wanted to give his defeated opponents opportunities to declare their loyalties. Some others are of the view that Ranjit Singh was more anxious to possess the treasury of Multan than the province itself and he was apprehensive that his attempt to occupy the state immediately may make its ruler escape with it. But according to Fauja Singh, "Money was not the real objective of the Maharaja, his successive demands upon the Nawab gradually drained off the resources of Multan, thereby preparing the ground for its final capture."<sup>5</sup> One very pertinent point seems to be that at the time of his first invasion, Ranjit Singh was not strong enough to subdue the Multan citadel. Moreover, Ranjit Singh's successive invasions were likely to weaken the enemy as also demoralise the Nawab and his forces. Everytime, therefore, when he led an expedition, he not only accepted the *nazrana* from the Nawab but also an assurance that he would continue paying the amount in the subsequent years. Muzaffar Khan's repeatedly breaking his promise in not paying the annual tribute, gave Ranjit Singh enough pretext for his repeated invasions of Multan.

Ranjit Singh's first three campaigns upon Multan can be put as his 'expeditionary survey' as also to serve 'as warnings to the Nawab of the shape of things to come in due course.'<sup>6</sup>

Ranjit Singh's first attack upon Multan was in 1802. According to Griffin this time Ranjit Singh, "Marched from Lahore to spy out the

4. Fakeer Syed Waheeduddin, *The Real Ranjit Singh*, reprint, Patiala, 1981, p. 76.

5. Fauja Singh, *State and Society under Ranjit Singh*, New Delhi, 1982, p. 302.

6. *Ibid.*

land.”<sup>7</sup> He further writes, “the Nawab came out to meet him thirty miles from the city and chiefs having interchanged valuable presents parted very good friend.”<sup>8</sup> Similar account has been given by Sita Ram Kohli.<sup>9</sup> Amar Nath also does not refer to any entry of soldiers in the city. But according to Kanahya Lal’s *Ranjit nama* and Dewan Amar Nath’s *Zafar Nama-i-Ranjit Singh* a battle was fought between the troops of Nawab Muzaffar Khan and Ranjit Singh and that the town was ransacked by the Sikhs.<sup>10</sup> Bikramjit Hasrat says that, “there is no corroborating evidence supporting (these) local histories.”<sup>11</sup> But the present author feels that this controversy can be set straight in view of the account given by Sohan Lal Suri in the *Umdat-ut-Twarikh*. According to him :

A few men were wounded and some were killed. The victorious armies of the *Sarkar* attacked with all their might and entered the peaceful city of Multan. Whole of the city was ransacked. A lot of booty, other goods and clothes, etc., fell in the hands of the warriors. City of Multan stood devastated. Nawab Muzaffar Khan sent his *vakils* in the service of the great *Sirkar* and offered to pay *nazrana*.<sup>12</sup>

During this campaign Ranjit Singh also extracted a tribute each from Jhang and Sahiwal. After his first campaign against Multan it could be well imagined that Kabul was losing its control over its distant possessions and its local representatives in India were not strong enough to offer determined resistance to Ranjit Singh.<sup>13</sup> But Ranjit Singh had sense of limits. “He was not yet prepared to sieze more than he could swallow.”<sup>14</sup>

In 1805, Ranjit Singh again marched upon Multan with a pretext to realise tribute from the Nawab which the latter had stopped paying. On his way, Ranjit Singh came to know that Holkar, the Maratha chief, was advancing towards the eastern frontiers as he was being

7. Lepel Griffin, *Ranjit Singh*, reprint, Delhi, 1957, p. 183.

8. Amar Nath, *Zafar Nama-i-Ranjit Singh* (Pbi. tr. by Prof. Janak Singh), Punjabi University, Patiala, 1983, p. 18.

9. Sita Ram Kohli, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh* (Pbi.), Delhi, 1953, p. 58.

10. Bikramajit Hasrat, *Life and Times of Ranjit Singh*, Hoshiarpur, 1977, p. 92.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Twarikh*, Vol. II (Pbi.), Amritsar, 1985, p. 69.

13. A. C. Banerjee, *The Khalsa Raj*, New Delhi, 1985, p. 60.

14. *Ibid.*



hotly pursued by the British army under Lake. At this the Maharaja sent his *vakil* to the Nawab with a message that he should immediately pay the amount of tribute to his emissaries.<sup>15</sup> Hence he extracted a tribute of rupees 70,000<sup>16</sup> from the Nawab and returned to Amritsar.

Two years later in 1807, Ranjit Singh learnt that the Nawab was intriguing with Ahmed Khan Sial of Jhang and Qutab-ud-Din Khan of Kasur against him. So he marched upon Multan. After reaching the vicinity of the city, Fateh Singh was sent by the Maharaja to demand from the Nawab an explanation for his conduct and the reason for his stopping the payment of the annual tribute. On receiving unsatisfactory reply, Ranjit Singh invaded the city and occupied many parts of it but the Pathans shut themselves in the fort. The Sikh ruler having no siege train, again contented himself with a tribute of rupees 70,000. Having come to terms with the Daudpota Nawab of Bahawalpur, he returned to his capital.<sup>17</sup>

So far Ranjit Singh's conduct appears to have been systematically regulated by a determination to level to a condition of vassalage every one who was in a position to assert his independence, who was in the enjoyment of a patrimony won by his ancestor's valour.<sup>18</sup> Of the twelve original *misals* none now remained in the Punjab but that of Ranjit Singh himself and three others, all closely associated with him and ranged under his standard. The young Maharaja had already severed the chain of small states around Multan which were linked together in their allegiance to the Afghans. Now all that remained was Multan itself. Three attempts already made had proved futile in capturing the Multan citadel but for which the possession of the city did not amount much.

At this time Shah Shuja, the exiled monarch of Afghanistan, happened to meet Ranjit Singh at Sahiwal and sought his help against his rivals. Ranjit Singh foreseeing that the ex-king's influence might be of use to him offered Shah Shuja an asylum at Lahore which was accepted, and discussed a proposal for a joint attack on Multan,<sup>19</sup> promising to hand it over to the latter.<sup>20</sup> But Shah Shuja was 'apprehensive,' as he

15. Sohan Lal Suri, *op.cit.*, p. 67.

16. G. L. Chopra, *The Punjab as a Sovereign State*, Hoshiarpur, 1960, p. 10.

17. Bikramajit Hasrat, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

18. W. G. Osborne, *The Court and Camp of Ranjit Singh*, reprint, Delhi, 1973, p. XXX.

19. C. H. Payne, *A Short History of the Sikhs*, reprint, Patiala, 1970, p. 90.

20. A. C. Banerjee, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

says in his autobiography that if it fell into his hands, he would keep it to himself.<sup>21</sup> This apprehension was not reasonable as Ranjit Singh could hardly be expected to conquer Multan for Shah Shuja's benefit. This episode is very important because it hints at a new strategy developing in Ranjit Singh's mind, viz., utilization of Afghan civil war for his own purpose. According to Griffin, "The Maharaja treated the weak-minded prince with great respect, but failing to obtain any money from him, determined to take Multan on his own account."<sup>22</sup> Whatever it may be, there is no denying the fact that herein, "The Maharaja's subtlest sense of expediency is displayed to make capital out of his talks with Shah Shuja." Ranjit Singh, envisaging his utility as a Trojan horse, at once marched upon Multan to demand its possession in the name of the Shah.<sup>23</sup>

Ranjit Singh, while executing his war plans never forgot the key of military strategy and diplomacy, i.e., "to keep a strict veil of secrecy over his intentions." Wishing to create a surprise in the invasion of Multan in 1810, he mobilized his army partly at Akhnour (Jammu) with the object of misleading the Nawab of Multan into thinking that he was going to invade Kashmir.<sup>24</sup>

Undertaken in 1810, this was Ranjit Singh's first serious attempt for the conquest of Multan. Commanded by Dewan Mohkam Chand, the Lahore forces took hardly any time to occupy the city. Now they lay a siege of the fort which continued for four months.

In the meantime Ranjit Singh played another tact of diplomacy to demoralise the chiefs around Multan as also keeping them occupied with himself, hence checking their advance to the rescue of the Nawab of Multan. So Ranjit Singh called upon the chiefs of Leiah, Bhakkar and Kanchi and the Nawab of Bhawalpur to join him. These chiefs paid a collective ransom of 1,20,000 rupees and Daudpota Nawab's offer of 1,00,000 rupees having been turned down by Ranjit Singh, he furnished a contingent of 500 horses.<sup>25</sup>

The most strenuous attempts of the Lahore army to carry the fort by assault signally failed. A heavy bombardment was kept up for

21. *Ibid.*

22. Lepel Griffin, *Chiefs and Families of Note*, Lahore, 1891, p. 346.

23. Fauja Singh, *Military System of the Sikhs*, Delhi, 1964, p. 302.

24. A.C. Banerjee, *op.cit.*, p. 77.

25. Bikramajit Hasrat, *op.cit.*, p. 93.

several days but without any effect. Batteries were then erected opposite the fort, and an incessant fire was maintained but hardly any impression was made on the citadel. Recourse was at length had to mining, but the besieged successfully countermined.<sup>26</sup> Ranjit Singh made the most solemn and lavish promises to the chiefs who should distinguish themselves in the action by the earliest effective advance. He personally reconnoitred the enemy's position, examined his posts and fixed his own, marking out the spots for the batteries and assigning lines of approach to the different chiefs, whose sense of duty to their countrymen was appealed to with vehemence. Extensive transport arrangements were made both by land and water from Lahore and Amritsar, and the whole resources placed at the disposal of the military authorities to secure this much coveted possession. The famous Bhangi *top zamzama* was brought from Lahore to batter down the walls of the fort, but it made little impression on the besieged. During the siege, "the Sikh army was greatly reduced and its best soldiers and generals killed or incapacitated."<sup>27</sup> Attar Singh Dhari, a confidant of Ranjit Singh, was killed. Nihal Singh and Hari Singh Nalwa were seriously wounded.

The Sikh army sent under Dewan Mohkam Chand to reduce Shujabad, 20 miles from Multan, also found the fort impregnable. Mohkam Chand was obliged through illness to relinquish the command and at the end of a month the Maharaja was compelled by the circumstances "to accept now the very terms which had on so many previous occasions rejected with scorn, namely, a tribute of two and a half lakhs of rupees, twenty charges and a contingent in time of war."<sup>28</sup> The Nawab gave 30,000 rupees in cash and sent his brother-in-law Ababakar Khan as hostage in lieu of the rest of the money.<sup>29</sup>

Much depressed by the ill-success of his campaign, the Maharaja returned to Lahore on 25th April 1810. But this did not mean relinquishing of his original objective of capturing Multan including the citadel, "his accommodation of the enemy was only a passing phase, because attempts were continued to exploit every favourable opportunity that arose to further attainment of the final goal."<sup>30</sup>

26. S. M. Latif, *History of the Punjab*, reprint, New Delhi, 1964, p. 386.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*

29. Sohan Lal Suri, *op.cit.*, p. 114.

30. Fauja Singh, *op.cit.*, p. 313.

Gordon seems to have rightly understood Ranjit Singh's strategy and diplomacy. According to him, "he knew how and when to execute, when to yield and how to contract his measure."<sup>31</sup>

Both parties having felt demoralised, each requested the British to come to their rescue, Muzaffar Khan was in correspondence with the British Viceroy in Calcutta and Ranjit Singh feared that a tender of allegiance might not only be made but accepted<sup>32</sup> He, therefore, proposed to Sir David Ochterlony that the two allied powers should march against Multan and divide the conquest equally.<sup>33</sup> It was surmised that he wanted to siege train of the English, but he may likewise have wished to know whether the Sutlej was to be as good a boundary in the south as in the north. He was told reprovingly that the English committed aggressions upon no one, but otherwise the tenor of the correspondence was such as to lead, him to believe that he would not be interfered with in his designs upon Multan.<sup>34</sup> According to Latif, "both the chiefs were left to themselves and told to settle their affairs as best they could."<sup>35</sup>

Now Ranjit Singh turned his attention to the introduction of measures of reform in his military department. He reorganised his army after European fashion with the express motive to reduce the Afghans.

Meanwhile Fateh Khan was threatening Nawab Muzaffar Khan of Multan, who was hostile to the Barakzai cause. He secured promises of cooperation from the Nawabs of Dera Ghazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan and other Afghan chiefs on the west side of the Indus. The Sikh ruler could neither allow Fateh Khan to cross the Indus nor he could allow Multan to be siezed by Kabul, for he had his eyes on Multan since 1802. Hence the Maharaja played a superb diplomacy when he agreed to support Muzaffar Khan in case of an attack by Fateh Khan. However, Fateh Khan's threat did not materialise. Perhaps he was not prepared for another contest with the Sikhs.<sup>36</sup>

Feeling himself strong enough in 1816, Ranjit Singh joined by

31. J. H. Gordon, *op.cit.*, p. 95.

32. J. D. Cunningham, *A History of the Sikhs*, reprint, Delhi, 1955, p. 135; D. Ochterlony to Govt. of India 29 March and 23 May 1810.

33. *Ibid.*, D. Ochterlony to Govt. of India 23 July and 13 August 1810.

34. *Ibid.*, D. Ochterlony to Govt. of India, 29th March and 17th Sept. 1810.

35. S. M. Latif, *op.cit.*, p. 387.

36. A. C. Banerjee, *op.cit.*, pp. 78-80.

Fateh Singh Ahluwalia again moved in the direction of Multan and Bahawalpur at the head of his troops. Collecting tributes and exacting *nazranas* from the *zamindars* on the way the Maharaja reached Talumba where Sayed Muhsin Shah, *vakil* of Muzaffar Khan, brought presents of horses, shawls and carpets for the Maharaja, who demanded a lakh and twenty-thousand rupees as *nazrana*. The agent asked for time to pay the subsidy, offering to pay rupees 40,000 in cash and the balance after two months. But the Sikh ruler becoming impatient laid siege to Ahmedabad, which was reduced without difficulty by the artillery of Misar Diwan Chand. An advanced column of the Sikhs reached Multan to enforce payment of the tribute. There being some delay in Muzaffar Khan's payment, Phula Singh Akali made an uncalled for attack on the enemy and gained possession of some of the outworks of the citadel. "At this Nawab paid his tribute quicker than he would otherwise have done."<sup>37</sup>

He remitted rupees 80,000 through Diwan Bhiwani Das and promised in a short time to pay the balance of rupees 40,000. "The cupidity of the Lahore ruler being thus satisfied, he marched on to Mankera."<sup>38</sup>

Ranjit Singh sent another expedition to Multan the following year under Diwan Moti Ram, Bhiwani Das, Hari Singh Nalwa and other Sardars with a large force to enforce the payment of tribute from the Nawab, who was, in fact, a habitual defaulter in this respect and gave repeated chances to Ranjit Singh to attack Multan. But according to Diwan Amar Nath, "Muzaffar Khan himself was a nice man. It was his son, heir apparent Sarafraz Khan, who did not want to pay any tribute to Maharaja Ranjit Singh."<sup>39</sup> Ranjit Singh was shrewed enough to anticipate that this time again the Nawab would try to put forward one pretext or the other. That is what happened. Hence he despatched his forces, already in waiting. Misar Diwan Chand, commandant of the artillery followed with a large number of guns. But before the actual attack, Ranjit Singh tried to go into his enemy's mind. The offer of liberal terms was generally accompanied or followed by warnings or dire consequences in the event of hostilities breaking out. This was done with the object of intimidating the enemy into submission.

37. Lepel Griffin, *op.cit.*, p. 185.

38. S. M. Latif, *op.cit.*, p. 407.

39. Amar Nath, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

During this campaign too, Ranjit Singh wrote to one of his commanders :

"If the Nawab of Multan pays up the revenue, it is alright, otherwise his country should be ransacked and he should go afterwards to realise the tax from Dera Ghazi Khan and that if its ruler also refuses to pay, his country should likewise be plundered."<sup>40</sup>

The forces of Ranjit Singh advanced towards the city and took hardly any time to capture it. Now they besieged the fort but Muzaffar Khan made gallant defence and compelled the Lahore armies to raise the siege and retire. This was largely because of the carelessness on the part of the commanders of the campaign.<sup>41</sup> Thus "in 1816 and again in the following year, Ranjit Singh attempted to carry the fortress by storm, but on both occasions his attack was repulsed and he was forced, as in 1810, to retire with such tribute as he could exact."<sup>42</sup>

Ranjit Singh never spared the generals who committed blunders. When the army reached Lahore, the Maharaja placed Bhiwani Das, who had conducted the siege in confinement, besides imposing on him a fine of rupees 10,000.<sup>43</sup>

By now Ranjit Singh had attacked Multan six times. He and his enemy knew each other so did their armies. In fact, all these attempts by Ranjit Singh were not made in earnest.<sup>44</sup> By his repeated invasions, Ranjit Singh had drained the resources of the Nawab as also created in him and his forces a fear for the Lahore army. The Maharaja was collecting his strength for a greater effort, and had sworn that Multan, which had so often defied him, should yet be his. But he knew it well that to reduce the Multan citadel was still not easy. He ought to motivate his generals, prepare his armies, organise his supplies, infuse morale among the people and last but not the least prepare himself for all consequences to realise his dream.

Ranjit Singh exercised full strategical control over this campaign.

40. Sohan Lal Suri, *op.cit.*, p. 57; see also Fauja Singh, *op.cit.*, p. 303.

41. Sita Ram Kohli, *op.cit.*, p. 141.

42. W.L.M'Gregor, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, reprint, Patiala, 1970, p. 96.

43. S.M. Latif, *op.cit.*, p. 410. Diwan Amar Nath writes in his *Zafar Nama-i-Ranjit Singh*, that Diwan Bhiwani Das had accepted a bribe of rupees 10,000 from Nawab Muzaffar Khan of Multan.

44. Lepel Griffin, *op.cit.*, p. 185.

He realised well the dictum 'one who does not gain loses.'

The Maharaja asked his feudatories and governors to collect as great number of men as much ammunition and grain as possible. An elaborate system of boat transport through the Ravi, the Chenab and the Jhelum was organised with his chief base at the capital. Ranjit Singh supervised all the arrangements at Lahore, whence continuous supplies of grain, horses and ammunition were forwarded through the period of the siege.<sup>45</sup> Depots were opened along the route. Apart from armies own labour party, a band of 500 extra labourers were sent to help the Multan expedition in digging the trenches, etc.<sup>46</sup> Arrangements were made for official reports who furnished information regularly about the operations. Special establishments of *dak* were laid for the communication of war news and official orders. "A despatch rider was posted at every third mile between the capital (where Ranjit Singh was staying) and the army camp at Multan, so that the Maharaja could obtain the latest information and be able to transmit orders."<sup>47</sup>

A force of twenty thousand men under Misar Diwan Chand was immediately despatched. A contingent of Dogras under Gulab Singh was also sent to assist. Whereas Nihangs with their suicidal squads rallied under Akali Sadhu Singh. Artillery, which was expected to play a decisive role in battering the citadel, was under the command of General Elahi Baksh. The *zamzama* was again ordered to proceed. Mai Nakain, the mother of prince Kharak Singh, was deputed to Kot Kamalia, a place situated between Lahore and Multan, to superintend the despatch of provisions to the scene of action.<sup>48</sup> All the Sardars of the state were busy in collecting supplies of men from every quarter.<sup>49</sup>

Prince Kharak Singh was given the nominal command whereas the real command was in the hands of Misar Diwan Chand. "The jealousy of Jagirdars, who objected to serve under a man of yesterday, obliged Ranjit Singh to adopt the plan of seeing his heir-apparent in nominal command of the whole."<sup>50</sup> Moreover, it is only by effective cooperation that the component parts of any force or nation can develop the full

45. G. L. Chopra, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

46. Sita Ram Kohli, *op.cit.*, p. 142.

47. Fauja Singh, *op.cit.*, p. 318.

48. K. K. Khullar, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, New Delhi, 1980, p. 56.

49. S. M. Latif, *op.cit.*, p. 410.

50. W. L. M'Gregor. *op.cit.*, p. 39, see also Sita Ram Kohli, *op.cit.*, p. 141.

measure of their strength. Better the cooperation, greater the chances of success. This point of strategy and diplomacy was considerably realised by Ranjit Singh.

Ranjit Singh never lost sight of the objective once determined. Hence he ordered the two commanders of the expedition :

Give the *vakils* a frank reply that it is the intention of Ranjit Singh to occupy Multan and so, in future they should not talk about the giving of *nazarana*.<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand, Nawab Muzaffar Khan was fully aware of all these large scale preparations and guessed that this time he could not be able to buy off the Durbar.<sup>52</sup> In fact, he might have well anticipated that the day was not far when Multan would again fall in the hands of the Sikhs. Hence he aroused the Muslim peasants with the cry of *jehad* against the Punjab army and 20,000 *ghazis* gathered under his banner. Having failed to seek the support of the British, he tried to enlist the support of the neighbouring Muslim chieftains. However, he failed in his objective partly on account of the latter's fear of the Sikhs and partly owing to the superior diplomacy of Ranjit.<sup>53</sup> Hence the Nawab had to depend largely on his own resources and also on the fanaticism of the *ghazis*.

All the arrangements having been set, the armies were ordered to march. Ranjit Singh also went out of Lahore to live at a little distance and took a vow not to re-enter the capital until he should hear the news of the conquest of Multan.

Ranjit Singh's army was reputed for their quick movements and long marches. According to Steinbach, "Sikh army was capable of enduring the fatigue of long marches for several days in succession and were so hardy that exposure to oppressive heats or heavy rains had little effect upon them."<sup>54</sup>

Strike when the iron is hot. A radical turn to the situation was given by the assassination of Fateh Khan, the strong man of Afghanistan at Herat in 1818. Entire Afghanistan was now plunged with confusion. "The turmoil in Afghanistan was a god-sent opportunity for Ranjit Singh who immediately resolved to turn to it to his best

51. N. K. Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 32.

52. Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs (1469-1839)*, Vol. I, Delhi, 1978, p. 250.

53. G. L. Chopra, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

54. Steinbach, *The Punjab*, reprint, Patiala, 1970, p. 64.



advantage."<sup>55</sup>

Ranjit Singh planned to fight the battle of Multan in three phases. In the first, the countryside around Multan was to be occupied. In the second phase, the city of Multan was to be captured and finally the formidable fort of Multan was to be taken. On his way to Multan, Misar Diwan Chand captured the forts of Khangarh and Muzaffargarh as per instructions of the Maharaja.<sup>56</sup> Accordingly "a demand was made of an exorbitant sum in cash and five of Muzaffar Khan's best horses, and this not being immediately complied with, his two forts Mozaffurgarh and Khandesh were stormed and taken."<sup>57</sup>

The first engagement between the Afghans and the Lahore army came to be in the open. This battle lasted only for a day. Muzaffar Khan had to withdraw. The second round began with the Lahore troops surrounding the city and bombarding its walls. The *ghazis* fought fiercely and kept the invading armies at bay for a few weeks but had to retreat into the fort only to fight the third and last round. The city of Multan was captured. Ranjit Singh instructed his soldiers to keep a strict vigil on the city and not to resort to loot and plunder.<sup>58</sup> These orders set aside Griffin's charge that Multan was plundered and thousands of citizens were put to death. There is no denying the fact that occasionally Ranjit Singh did warn the enemy with dire consequences but he never meant to implement such orders. His generals and soldiers were well aware of this. They also knew what could be in store for them in case they go against the instructions of their master.

With the bombardment of the fort by the Lahore troops, the battle of Multan entered the last phase. Herein the Nawab had only a garrison of 2000 men and the citadel was not provisioned for a siege but he made a defence the like of which the Sikhs had never before seen.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, the fort was surrounded by a deep moat. Of course, it was dry during these days of March but the monsoon was not far off to fill it making the fall of the citadel almost impossible. Ranjit Singh, being abreast of the weather conditions of Multan, knew this well. He sent daily expresses to Diwan Chand urging the siege to be continued.

55. Fauja Singh, *State and Society under Ranjit Singh*, p. 308; see also; A. C. Banerjee, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

56. Sohan Lal Suri, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

57. W. L. M'Gregor, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.

58. Sohan Lal Suri, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

59. Lepel Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

He also sent him an angry note ordering him to hurry up.<sup>60</sup>

Bombardment went on *zamzama* was being fired with effect, causing two large breaches in the walls of the fort. But still the capture of the citadel was no where in sight. A strong assault made by the Lahore army was successfully repulsed by the Afghans. Here was fought a war which would be remembered for long times to come.<sup>61</sup> Now the gates of the fort were blown in but the garrison raised behind them mounds of earth on which they fought hand-to-hand with the Sikhs. At last the defenders of the fort were reduced to two or three hundred fighting men most of them of the tribe or family of Muzaffar Khan. The rest had either been killed or had gone over to the enemy, for, according to Griffin, they had been heavily bribed to desert their master.<sup>62</sup> In fact Ranjit Singh was Machiavillian in outlook. According to Wade, "he had an insatiable love of power and was ever ready to usurp further territories by every sort of means."<sup>63</sup> It is said that when the siege had continued to be of no use for the last three months, the Maharaja did not hesitate to give an incentive to his soldiers that they may resort to loot and plunder of Multan after its conquest.<sup>64</sup>

But it was invariably an endeavour on the part of the king to secure the surrender of the enemy through negotiations conducted before or in the course of hostilities. So Ranjit Singh repeatedly wrote to Misar Diwan Chand forbidding him to run the risk of storming the fort, for which the Sikh troops were eager, the object of the Maharaja being to compel Muzaffar Khan to surrender at discretion and agree to accept a *jagir* which had been offered to him.<sup>65</sup> This was to avoid the ruinous loss of life involved in such a rash adventure. Moreover, heat was increasing day by day and if the fort did not fall before

60. W. L. M'Gregor, *op.cit.*, p. 180.

61. Lepel Griffin, *op.cit.*, p. 186.

62. Amar Nath, *op.cit.*, p. 98. Ganesh Das writes in *Fateh Nama Guru Khalsaji ka*, pp. 106-07.

“ਤੋਪਾਂ ਚਲੀ ਅਪਾਰ, ਔਰ ਗੁਬਾਰੇ ਤਹਿਕਲੇ,

ਘਾਇਲ ਸਿੰਘ ਹਜ਼ਾਰ, ਕੁਛ ਕੁ ਗਏ ਸੁਰਗ ਧਾਮ ਕੇ।” (58)

63. Lepel Griffin, *op.cit.*, p. 186.

64. Fauja Singh, *Military System of the Sikhs*, p. 298.

65. Ganesh Das, *op.cit.*,

“ਮਾਰ ਕੇ ਖਾਨ ਸੇ ਲੈ ਮੁਲਤਾਨ

ਜੇ ਲੁਟ ਪਰਾਨ ਜੈ ਕਾਰ ਬੁਲਾਇਓ।” (37)

66. S. M. Latif, *op.cit.*, p. 412.

monsoon set in, it will be difficult for his armies to retreat.<sup>67</sup> Hence the Nawab, in case he sued for peace, was offered the territories of Shujabad and Khangarh for his maintenance. The Nawab on the other hand had found it impossible to stand against the Lahore army and agreed to sue for peace. But when the agent of Prince Kharak Singh, who was in command of the siege, arrived in the fort to conclude the terms of peace, the Nawab was dissuaded by his friends and relatives from keeping his word. They rather decided to fight the Khalsa army to the last. In fact Fateh Singh Ahluwalia had already considered this a matter of delaying tactics on the part of the Nawab.<sup>68</sup> On receipt of this information at Lahore, the Maharaja addressed a stirring letter to his officers encouraging them to capture Multan at once by killing the *ghazis*.<sup>69</sup>

At this the campaign took a dramatic turn. Sadhu Singh, an Akali fanatic, along with a few companions, as fanatical and reckless as himself, rushed, without orders, on the second of June (1818), into an outwork of the fort and fell suddenly on the ground. Afghans were taken by surprise. Seeing all this, the Sikh soldiers made a simultaneous advance on the spur of the moment and the entire work was carried. The defenders being all slaughtered in a hand-to-hand fight.<sup>70</sup> Only they survived who could escape. The Lahore armies resorted to loot and plunder.<sup>71</sup> Thus, "In spite of a splendid stubborn resistance, the fort was captured after a siege of four months by a sudden and furious assault carried out almost on the spur of the moment without any special plan or preparation."<sup>72</sup>

The Sikh forces made a triumphant entry into the fort. Here they saw the old Nawab with his eight sons and all that remained of his

67. Ganda Singh, 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh A Short Life-Sketch,' *Maharaja Ranjit Singh, First Death Centenary Memorial*, reprint, Patiala, 1970, p. 32.

68. Sita Ram Kohli, *op.cit.*, p. 143.

69. Sohan Lal Suri, *op.cit.*, p. 262.

70. S. M. Latif, *op.cit.*, p. 412; also W. L. M'Gregor, *op.cit.*, p. 97. For details also see Sita Ram Kohli, *op.cit.*, p. 146.

71. Ganesh Das, *op.cit.*, Chapter V, couplet 73.

“ਕਤਲ ਕੀਏ ਸੋ ਤੁਰਕ ਬਹੁ, ਮੁਗਲ ਪਠਾਨ ਜੁ ਖਾਨ,

ਬਚੇ ਤੇਉ ਛਪ ਗਏ, ਲੂਟ ਲੀਓ ਮੁਲਤਾਨ ।”

72. Charles Gough, *The Sikhs and The Sikh Wars*; reprint, Patiala, 1970, p. 35.

garrison stood sword-in-sword to fight to the last. "As a last effort Moozuffur Khan, arming himself and his followers, rushed out of the citadel on the assailants, cut his way through them, and reached the tomb of Bhawal Huk, prepared for battle afresh."<sup>73</sup> The Sikhs opened fire on the little party with their matchlocks. Muzaffar Khan reached Khijri Burj and fought desperately. The Nawab and his five sons fell.<sup>74</sup> Sarafraz Khan, the eldest son, Zulfikar Khan, the second son, and the youngest Amir Baz Khan were captured.

When all was over prince Kharak Singh made his triumphant entry into the fort and took possession of all the state property and treasures belonging to the Nawab. The fort of Shujabad was also captured and sacked and booty, estimated at four lakhs of rupees, consisting of gold and silver utensils, and other valuables, fell into the hands of the victors.<sup>75</sup>

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was too happy to know about the fall of the Multan citadel.<sup>76</sup> The towns of Lahore and Amritsar were brilliantly illuminated and money was sent as alms to every place of Hindu and Mohammedan worship at Lahore. A large offering in money was sent to the Durbar Sahib at Amritsar. Maharaja himself paid a visit to the Durgah of Shah Abdul Maali at Lahore, joined the prayer with his Muslim subjects on the day of 'Id-ul-Fitr.' The palace was a scene of festivities for several days and a large number of gold bracelets necklaces and shawls were sent by the Maharaja to Multan for distribution among those Sardars and jagirdars who had distinguished themselves in the action. The title Jafar-Jang, "the sincere-well-wisher and hero victorious in war," as also a jagir and a role of honour were conferred on Misar Diwan Chand.

In the midst, however, of these rejoicings, and in strong contrast

73. W. L. M'Gregor, *op.cit.*, p. 180.

74. Five sons fell were Shah Nawaz Khan, Mumtaz Khan, Ayaz Khan, Haknawaz Khan and Shahbaz Khan.

75. S. M. Latif, *op.cit.*, p. 412. Amar Nath gives the value of the war-booty captured from the fort of Sujahad, only Rs. 20,000. See Amar Nath, *op.cit.*, p. 101. Ganesh Das also writes in his *Fateh Nama Guru Khalsa ji ka*.

76. Ganesh Das, *op.cit.*, p. 446. He writes :

ਸੁ ਲਹੌਰ ਜਬ ਆਏ, ਸੁਣ ਸਿੰਘ ਸੁਖ ਪਾਏ,  
ਤੋਪਾਂ ਸਲਕ ਚਲਾਏ, ਦਾਨ ਦੇਤ ਹਰ ਖਾਏ ਹੈ ।  
ਕੀਨੀ ਬਖਸ਼ ਅਪਾਰ, ਲੈ ਕੇ ਆਇਓ ਜੋ ਉਸਾਰ,  
ਤਬ ਬਾਰੀ ਦੀਪ ਪਾਰ, ਮਨ ਮੋਦ ਕੋ ਬੜਾਏ ਹੈ ।"(20)

to his many acts of princely munificence, according to Latif, "Ranjit Singh displayed, in one instance a degree of avarice only too characteristic of him, and showing that to his intense thirst for conquest and territorial aggrandizement was added an equally intense passion for the accumulation of wealth."<sup>77</sup> Ranjit Singh, according to him, had always considered Multan a great repository of wealth. The war-booty he received falling too short of his expectations "he issued orders for the return of the whole army to Lahore except a detachment under Jodh Singh Kalsia to hold the place and conduct the administration."<sup>78</sup> Griffin writes, "On the return of the army, he issued a proclamation calling on all Sardars, jagirdars, officers and soldiers to surrender to the state all they had obtained at Multan by plunder. This order brought in some five lakhs to the state but the plunder of Multan was estimated at two million sterling."<sup>79</sup> Those who would not comply to orders were to be hanged.<sup>80</sup> According to Amar Nath, there is no denying the fact that war-booty estimated at crores of rupees.<sup>81</sup> According to Cunningham, Ranjit Singh "may have felt some pride that his commands were not altogether unheeded but he complained that they were not so productive as he had expected."<sup>82</sup> But all these conclusions drawn by Griffin, Latif and Prinsep seem to be in contravention of the orders conveyed by Ranjit Singh to his forces not to resort to any loot and plunder. According to Sohan Lal Suri, when Munshi Shiv Dial gave a detailed account of the war-booty, the Maharaja was rather enraged at it. He reminded the Sardars that he had instructed them not to resort to loot and plunder. He was sorry that no body had heeded to his orders. At this, explains Sohan Lal Suri, that Diwan Chand asked his Sardars in isolation, to disgorge all the war-booty they had fetched from Multan. He also asked them to take a vow before the Maharaja that they will not resort to such acts in future.<sup>83</sup>

On the other hand Sita Ram Kohli has also written about this in detail. According to him the Maharaja knew that the fort was a store-

77. *Ibid.*, p. 413.

78. Henry, T. Prinsep, *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab*, reprint, New Delhi, 1985, p. 92.

79. Griffin, *op.cit.*, p. 187.

80. Amar Nath, *op.cit.*, p. 101.

81. *Ibid.*

82. J. D. Cunningham, *op.cit.*, p. 141; also see Prinsep, *op.cit.*, p. 92.

83. Sohan Lal Suri, *op.cit.*, p. 272.

house of endless treasures which might also have some rare articles. He did not want that such precious and astonishing things should be looted by his soldiers and wasted. He felt that for all these things right place to preserve was the state treasury. So he issued orders in the name of all Sardars that treasury of Multan could not be the personal property of either the Maharaja or any Sardar or a soldier but belonged to Lahore state. So nothing should be lost rather all things ought to be brought to Lahore. But the soldiers had entered the fort without waiting for any orders from their Sardars and resorted to loot and plunder. Even commanders of the Sikh army were amazed at their behaviour. So now Ram Dial was appointed to protect the *toshakhana* and treasury. All the doors of the fort were closed. Each soldier—going out was searched and made to disgorge whatever looted. Hence whole of this wealth was sent to Lahore.<sup>84</sup>

So, in the presence of Sohan Lal Suri's and Sita Ram Kohli's account, we may conclude that it was never after the liking of Ranjit Singh that his soldiers should resort to loot and plunder. The Maharaja treated the vanquished in a befitting manner. He received Sarafriz Khan with due honour and sent him a *ziafat* of rupees 2500. Zulfikar Khan and his younger brother too were granted befitting pensions as to suit their subsistence. According to Ganesh Das when the news of Ranjit Singh's conquest flashed to British, they did not like it.<sup>85</sup>

The civil government of the conquered territory was entrusted to Sukh Dayal, Military posts were established all over the province. Land revenue was also settled by specially deputed officers. A garrison of 600 men was left there. Sawan Mal was appointed the Governor of Multan in 1821.

The conquest of Multan marks a great landmark in the history of Ranjit Singh. It was a master-stroke of his strategy and diplomacy employed during the war. The annexation of Multan showered on Ranjit Singh many-fold blessings. It not only led to the expansion of his empire but also earned him a revenue of seven lakh rupees annually. It was also a centre of trade through which goods were exchanged with the countries lying beyond the Bolan Pass. Manufacture of silks and carpets were the popular industries of the city. Apart from it, the land was also very fertile for wheat, indigo and cotton which

84. Sita Ram Kohli, *op.cit.*, pp. 147-48.

85. Ganesh Das, *op.cit.*, Chapter V, Couplet 10.

the people of Multan exported to different parts within the country and without. Moreover, conquest of Multan created a wedge between the Muslim territories of Bahawalpur and those along the southern course of the Indus and thus removed possible danger of their combination. This conquest not only stripped the Afghans of their last stronghold east of the Indus, but also opened for Ranjit Singh a new route to lower Indus valley.<sup>86</sup> It subdued the chiefs of Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan and Mankera. Above all conquest of Multan infused great confidence in Ranjit Singh and his troops to go ahead with his other major conquests of Kashmir and Peshawar. In fact Multan proved a base upon which Ranjit Singh erected the super-structure of his other major conquests.

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86. A. C. Bannerjee, *op.cit.*, p. 80.

# Civil Administration of Maharaja Ranjit Singh\*

G. L. CHOPRA

## I

### The Development of Departmental Organisation<sup>1</sup>

Maharaja Ranjit Singh, as we know, succeeded to the chieftainship of the Sukkarchakkia Misal in the Sambat 1847 (1790 A.D.). The administration of the Misal was a simple affair for the energetic Sardar. Under such a domestic constitution, as the Misal implied, the affairs indeed were so simple that there was no need for establishing any elaborate *Daftar*. A few personal assistants like the *Dewan* (financial adviser), the *Toshakhania* (treasurer) and the *Munshis* (clerks) were all that were necessary.

Dewan Lakhpat Rai was the Dewan of the late Maha Singh, father of Ranjit Singh. Ranjit Singh, being ten years old when his father died, his mother Sardarni Raj Kaur, also called *Mai Malwain*, became regent during his minority. She was assisted by Dewan Lakhpat Rai, who is reputed to have acted with ability and enthusiasm.

He, however, picked a quarrel with Sardar Dal Singh, the maternal uncle of Ranjit Singh's father. Ranjit Singh intervened and they were temporarily reconciled, and Dewan Lakhpat Rai continued in his post. But upon attaining the age of seventeen years, Ranjit Singh assumed in person the conduct of affairs.

Besides the Dewanship, there was the important post of the *Toshakhania*. This post was held by Misr Basti Ram who had followed his father and grandfather in the office. Misr Basti Ram had the help of Jassa Misr now and then as necessity arose. He had also under him Gurmukh Singh<sup>2</sup> appointed in the year 1780 A.D. Gurmukh Singh was

\* Culled from *Maharaja Ranjit Singh First Death Centenary Memorial*, Amritsar, 1939, pp. 99-122.

1. From the 'Report on the Examination of Documents Recently Discovered in the Fort at Lahore' by Nand Lal Rajpal, M.A. [Punjab Government Records Office Publication.]
2. In the summer of 1780 A.D. as Sardar Maha Singh was passing through the little town of Kheora on his return from an expedition in the neighbourhood of Pind Dadan Khan, Gurmukh Singh, then a boy of eight years, was presented

[Continued on page 123]



the man who accompanied Ranjit Singh at the capture of Lahore in 1799 A.D. and was then made pay-master of the forces and put in charge of whatever treasure the Sukkerchakkia chief came to possess at Lahore.

For several years even after the occupation of Lahore Ranjit Singh had little leisure for the organisation of any civil establishment. He remained constantly busy in war and diplomacy except that he devoted his attention equally to the collection of money. He availed himself of many sources of taxation, direct and indirect, upon land, houses, imports and exports. Indeed his success in war and diplomacy depended largely on the augmentation of his financial resources. Thus in course of time the establishment and growth of the Finance and other departments and the institution of Seals were brought about by the necessities arising from territorial expansion.

The departmental organisation of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Secretariat and the institution of the various Seals, and the circumlocutory arrangement, in particular, will indicate the degree of perfection attained by the Sikh Government.

*Sarishta-i-Hazur*—The earliest existing seal of Ranjit Singh bears the Sambat 1856 (1800 A.D.).<sup>3</sup> This would show that Ranjit Singh used his seal for the first time after the occupation of Lahore, that is nine years after his succession to the leadership of the Sukkarchakkia confederacy, or four years after his personal assumption of power. He established a mint in 1801 A.D. But he took two years more to start the organisation of the *Hazur* department which may be dated back along with the appointment of Dewan Devi Das to 1218 Hijri, which corresponds to the Sambat 1860 or 1803 A.D. This view is based upon the discovery of a seal bearing the inscription "Az qirar-i-hukm-i-ashraf 1218" (1218 must be Hijri) under the caption "*Sabt Sarishta-i-Hazur Shud*". When pay orders were put up before the Maharaja for approval, they were thus sealed to denote that the order had been correctly

*Continued from page 122]*

by his uncle Basti Ram, the *Toshakhania*. The Sardar was pleased with the bright eyes and intelligent looks of the boy and kept him with himself. Later in the same year Ranjit Singh was born, and Gurmukh Singh was appointed his companion.

3. An impression of this seal may be seen in a photograph of the Seals of the Lahore Khalsa Darbar hung in the Record Office. The seals of the Maharaja on pay orders bear no Sambat at all.

rendered in writing.

*Daftar-i-Devi Das*—The Daftar headed by Dewan Devi Dass also was created not later than 1803 A.D., because, side by side with the seal of the *Hazur* appears the seal of Devi Das under the caption "*navishta shud*" (recorded). It is, therefore, abundantly clear that Devi Das must have been appointed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in or before 1803 A.D., and not towards the end of 1809 A.D. as stated in Griffin's *The Punjab Chiefs*.

The position of Dewan Devi Dass would not necessarily be superior to that of his brother Dewan Bhawani Das because of the former's priority in entering service. As a matter of fact when Bhawani Das was appointed by the Darbar in 1808 A.D., Devi Das was just an associate, neither being subordinate to the other. The brothers always got on well together. Devi Das was a man of as great an ability and far greater integrity than his brother, though, being a man of retiring disposition, he never grew so prominent.

It was at about this time when, in consequence of the territorial expansion which had been going on since 1799 A.D., the State had gone nearly bankrupt and its revenue, amounting to thirty lacs of rupees per annum, had been mortgaged to Rama Nand, the rich banker of Amritsar, under whose control Misr Basti Ram, the *Toshakhania*, was transferred to work. Under these conditions, Devi Das must have worked very hard to make up the deficiency in the revenue.

*Naqal Daftar*—There was another Daftar, known by the name of Naqal Daftar, which may be dated back to the same year as the establishment of the *Sarishta-i-Hazur*, i.e., Sambat 1860 (1803 A.D.). The reason for this is that this Copying Office would naturally be established along with the office for the original work. To say nothing of a state, ordinary private offices have necessarily Naqal sections attached to them from the very start.

*Sarishta-i-Dewani*—The fourth Daftar, *Sarishta-i-Dewani*, was established in Sambat 1864, that is, four years after the appointment of Devi Das, or one year before the appointment of Bhawani Das. This Daftar is represented on the pay-orders by the seals with the inscription "Kirpa Ram, 1864" under the caption *Sarishta-i-Dewani*.

"All this would go to show that the four Daftars had been established before the appointment of Bhawani Das" in Sambat 1866.

*Sarishta-i-Bhawani Das*—The fifth Daftar, "*Sarishta*" was organised in Sambat 1865 (1808 A.D.) and was headed by Bhawani Das, the

finance minister himself, in evidence whereof are the seals of this Dewan bearing his name and Sambat 1865 under caption "*Sabt Sarishta Shud.*" The Sambat 1865 corresponds to the year 1808 A. D. which agrees with the year of his appointment as known from other sources.

It may be noted here that the system of employing the Muslim era had, by then, been given up in favour of Bikrami. The earliest instance of the use of Bikrami is found in the seal "*Kirpa Ram, 1864*" under the caption "*Sabt Sarishta-i-Dewani.*"

Dewan Bhawani Das does not seem to have organised this fifth Daftar (*Sarishta*) until Sambat 1868, that is, three years after his appointment as finance minister. This view is supported by two pieces of evidence. One is that the old seal "*Bhawani Das, 1865*" is given up and the new seal bearing the inscription "*Sabt Daftar, 1868*" is used instead. Secondly, the "*Dina Nath*" series begins from Sambat 1868. Between Sambat 1865 when he was first appointed to organise the Daftars and Sambat 1868 when he actually brought the fiscal system on a sound footing, for the greater part he was employed by the Maharaja in organising the revenue assessment and collection in the newly conquered territories or in commanding military expeditions. It was not till Sambat 1868 that he returned to headquarters permanently and settled down to his new work in the finance department.

*The "Daftar" (General Secretariat) :—*The sixth Daftar is simply known by this name. The relevant seal pertaining to this Daftar bears the inscription "*Sabt Daftar, 1868*" without any caption, whereas the corresponding seal for the fifth Daftar has both the inscription and caption.

The general impression among historians of the Sikh period is that the departmental organisation was started in 1808 A. D. This, however, is not true. The records establish that at least four Daftars existed before this date and that though Dewan Bhawani Das might have set up his personal Daftar (*Sarishta*) in 1808 A. D., it was not till as late as 1811 A. D. that the "*Daftar*" (General Secretariat) was brought into existence. This Daftar seems to have been reorganised in the Sambat 1877 (1820 A.D.). This is evidenced by the new seals which were then brought into use. These new seals bear the inscription "*Sabt Sarishta-i-Daftar, 1877.*" Finally, in Sambat 1885 (1828 A. D.) this Daftar was again remodelled, the fresh seals used bearing Sambat 1885.

*Daftar-i-Ganga Ram :—*The seventh Daftar originated in Sambat

1874 (1817 A. D.) and was headed by Ganga Sahai who probably was the same person as Ganga Ram. In order to assist Bhawani Das in his work of departmental organisation, Maharaja Ranjit Singh invited Ganga Ram<sup>4</sup>, who was known as a man of ability and was recommended to the Maharaja by Bhai Lal Singh and Sardar Himmat Singh Jalwasia. Ganga Ram accepted the invitation and was accorded a cordial reception on his arrival at Lahore. Here he was placed at the head of the military office and put in charge of the seals. He was made one of the principal pay-masters of the Irregulars, Bhawani Das being the head of the department. With the help of Bhawani Das, his chief, Ganga Ram introduced great improvements in the system of military accounts.

Dewan Ganga Ram reorganised his Daftar in Sambat 1876 (1819 A. D.) and changed the Sambat in his seal accordingly.

Ganga Ram died in 1826 A. D. and was succeeded as Keeper of the Seals and in the military office by Dina Nath whom he had brought up most carefully and whose splendid abilities, later, shone to the extent that he was made finance minister after the death of Bhawani Dass in 1834 A. D.<sup>5</sup>

*Sarishta-i-Daftar*—The eighth Daftar was organised in the Sambat 1875 (1818 A. D.), the year which is wrongly known to be one of wholesale reorganisation of Ranjit Singh's Daftars by Dewan Bhawani Das. This Daftar was originally represented on the *Parwanas* by the

4. Ganga Ram was the son of Pandit Kishan Dass who along with others migrated from Kashmir on account of persecution by the Muslim rulers. Till 1808 A.D. we find Ganga Ram serving in the employ of the Maharaja of Gwalior where he made himself conspicuous by his honesty and ability. When in 1809 General Ochterloney negotiating a treaty between the British Government and the Sutlej States, Ganga Ram, from his knowledge of the political history of the states, proved of invaluable help to the General.
5. Dina Nath was son of Bakht Mal who, along with Ganga Ram and Lachhman Prashad, married three sisters. Dina Nath was invited by Ganga Ram and placed in the State office. He distinguished himself by his intelligence and business like habits and first attracted the notice of Maharaja Ranjit Singh after the capture of Multan in 1818 A.D., when he efficiently prepared the list of those entitled to reward. The adjustment of confused accounts of the province of Multan brought him great credit.

In 1838 A.D. he received the title of Dewan. During the times of Maharaja Kharak Singh, Kanwar Nau-Nihal Singh, Maharaja Sher Singh and Maharani Jindan, Dewan Dina Nath continued in office. Griffin offers an interesting sketch of his character and styles him the Talleyrand of the Punjab.

seal "Sarishta-i-Daftar 1875" or "Hans Raj 1876" under the caption "Navishta Shud." It seems that Hans Raj was in charge of this Daftar for some time after Sambat 1876.

*Daftar Toshakhana-i-Khas*—The ninth Daftar, Toshakhana-i-Khas was organised in the Sambat 1875 (1818 A. D.) as shown by seals of this Daftar. The Toshakhana was originally in charge of Misr Basti Ram who was succeeded by Misr Beli Ram.

*The Tenth Daftar*—This Daftar came into being in Sambat 1876 (1819 A. D.) originally headed by Shankar Dass. The Parwanas issued after the Sambat 1891 (1834 A. D.) bear the seal "Rattan Chand" in place of the seal "Shankar Dass, 1876." The change in name implies that Shankar Dass was succeeded in office by Rattan Chand.

*Daftar-i-Shahzada*—The eleventh Daftar, "Daftar-i-Shahzada" (Prince's Department) seems, from the seals of its department on the Parwanas, to have originated in Sambat 1878 (1821 A. D.)

*Daftar-i-Darogha*—The twelfth Daftar was the Daftar-i-Darogha. The Darogha was the head of the Octroi and Excise department. The seal of this Daftar bears inscription "Ram Dayal" and is affixed under the caption "Sabt Daftar-i-Darogha."

*Daftar-i-Roznamcha*—The thirteenth Daftar "Daftar-i-Roznamcha" was headed by Abdul Karim. The Seal of Abdul Karim on the Parwanas bears some date which cannot be deciphered. It may be safely assumed, however, that this Daftar must have been organised in Sambat 1873 as the Roznamcha papers amongst the "Dina Nath" series begin from Sambat 1873. The "Daftar-i-Roznamcha" recorded daily credit and debit transactions.

*Daftar-i-Moharyani*—The fourteenth Daftar was the "Daftar-i-Moharyani." Its function was to affix the seals of the Maharaja and charge commissions for such affixation from the payee—the commission to be deducted from the amount ordered to be paid from the Toshakhana.

*Daftar-i-Khas, or Daftar-i-M'uala*—The fifteenth Daftar was the Daftar-i-Khas or Daftar-i-M'uala organised in Sambat 1876 (1822 A.D.) and originally headed by Dewan Singh.

This in brief is a history of the inception and development of the Daftars. As time went on, some of these were abolished and a few amalgamated. The result was that, as Shahamat Ali tells us, towards the end of Ranjit Singh's reign there were only twelve Daftars in existence.

### The Circumlocutory Offices

A regular circumlocution office existed in Ranjit Singh's time. Not even a pie could be paid out of the state treasury except through a regular channel. It is worthy of note that the Maharaja evolved a more or less rigid and regular system which he consistently followed.

The pay-orders proceeded from the Maharaja in camp. The Munshis, whose duty was to write them, were kept in readiness; directly the Maharaja gave the order, the same was communicated to the Munshis through one or other of the reporters in attendance. It is noteworthy that no regular reporters were maintained and that this duty was discharged, without distinction or rank of status, by Raja Suchet Singh, Mian Dhian Singh, Ganda Singh Mehra, Rattan Singh Gadwai, Duni Mehra, Misr Ram Kishan, Devi Sahai, Misr Beli Ram, Qazi Niaz Ali, Bhai Kahan Singh, Sardara Farash and others. The Maharaja's order was communicated in the Punjabi language, and such order made reference to the payment being made with or without cuts—the technical word used being "kasar" or "bila kasar". The Munshi wrote the order in Persian, clearly mentioning the sum and nature of the cut, if any, and its rate per cent. Three kinds of cuts were referred to, namely "Kasar," "Kasar-i-Daftar" and "Kasar-i-Toshakhana." The Munshi did not sign his name but concluded the pay-order with the name and place of despatch. The pay-order embodied in itself details regarding the distribution of money, viz., the names of persons amongst whom it was to be distributed and the sum allotted to each of them, the name of the person through whom the money was being sent, the purpose for which it was to be paid, and the name of the person through whom the pay-order was communicated from the Maharaja. Sometimes the pay-order referred to the amount of the budget sanctioned for particular kind of expenses. The Parwana having thus been concluded, the departmental seal of the Munshi who wrote it was affixed to its head. The inscription in this seal reads "Nawishta Shud, 1883." The Parwana so sealed was presented to the Maharaja for approval. The Maharaja was able to understand the gist of whatever was read to him. This facility he had acquired both by reason of general shrewdness of character and through the habit of having read out to him books and papers in Persian, Hindi and Punjabi. He transacted business with readiness and precision. When the draft of his instructions regarding the pay-order was submitted after being

prepared in due form he could judge at once whether it fully met his view. On approval, two seals, one small and the other large, with inscription "Akal Sahai Ranjit Singh" in Gurmukhi, under the same caption "Mulahiza shud" (examined) in Persian affixed. Here it may be added that after the Sambat 1883, i.e. "1824 A. D.", the seal "Navishta shud" in Persian is superseded by the seal "Akal Sahai Daftar-i-Khas, 1881," in Gurmukhi. After Sambat 1885, i.e., "1828 A. D.," we find three more seals added on the face of the Parwana, all of them in the Persian script. They are inscribed as (1) "Akal Sahai Mohar-i-Ashtam, 1885" (by the grace of God, the seal of stamp, 1885); (2) "Akal Sahai Daftar-i-Toshakhana, 1885" (by the grace of God, the seal of Toshakhana, 1885); and "Akal Sahai Daftar-i-Afwaj, 1885" (by the grace of God, the Daftar of the Army, 1885). The first two seals may have a meaning in that the Parwana was to pass on to the Stamp Office for being stamped and to the Toshakhana for payment. But it is not clear why the Army Office should have been concerned in the matter.

From the Maharaja the Parwana went round the Daftars, starting from the Daftar "Sarishta-i-Hazur" where it was recorded and stamped with the seal "Az qirar-i-hukm-i-ashraf" under the caption "Sabt Sarishta-i-Hazur shud." From there, it passed to the Daftar of Devi Das where it was noted and stamped with the seal "Devi Das, 1218," under the caption "Navishta shud" (written). From the Daftar of Devi Das the Parwana was sent to the Daftar of his brother Bhawani Das, created in Sambat 1885 (1808 A.D.). After taking note of it, this Daftar affixed its seal with the inscription "Bhawani Das, 1865" under the caption "Sabt Sarishta shud." The Parwana was again passed on to the "Daftar" (General Secretariat) which was organized in Sambat 1808 and reorganized in Sambat 1877 (1820 A.D.) Here it was recorded and stamped with seal "Sabt Daftar, 1808" under the caption "Qalmi shud" (penned). This done, it went to the Naqal Daftar (copying office) which, as already mentioned, was organized in Sambat 1860 (1803 A.D.). Here it was copied word for word. This fact together with the date of copying was recorded in a corner of the reverse of the Parwana. The caption and the date of copying were given on the Parwanas artistically written. The date of copying is the same as the date on which the Parwana originated from the Maharaja, showing thereby that all the Daftars moved in camp with the Maharaja. From the copying office the Parwana went to the Daftar of Ganga Sahai for

information and record. This is the same office which was organized in Sambat 1874 (1817 A. D.) and reorganized in Sambat 1876 (1819 A. D.) Ganga Sahai affixed the seal "Ganga Sahai, 1874" (1817 A. D.) or "Ganga Sahai, 1876" after the Sambat 1876 under the caption "Mutl'a shud" (informed). The next Daftar, to which the Parwana went, was organised in the Sambat 1875 (1818 A. D.). The seal "Sabt Sarishta 1875" was affixed under the caption "Navishta shud." After the Sambat 1876, the seal "Sabt Sarishta 1876" was superseded by the seal "Hans Raj 1876" showing that before Sambat 1876 there was no prominent head of the Daftar. Hans Raj passed on the Parwana to the next Daftar organized in Sambat 1875 (1818 A. D.) and headed by Shankar Das. Here it was stamped with the seal "Shankar Das, 1875" under the caption "Itl'a Yaft" (informed). The Parwana issued before Sambat 1879 passed direct to the Toshakhana which was organized in Sambat 1875. Here was the Parwana filed and payment made. But later when the Circumlocution Office developed, other Daftars, some of them new and others fashioned out of those already existing, appeared. The first in series, Sambat 1885, was the Daftar-i-Dewani which it would be recalled, was originally organized in Sambat 1864, with Kirpa Ram at its head. The seal of this Daftar preceded that of the Daftar of the Maharaja, the "Sarishta-i-Hazur." Next in order came the Daftar-i-M'uala in Sambat 1879 with the seal "Sat Gur Sahai Khurm Rai" with the caption "Mandarj Daftar-i-M'uala shud" (recorded in the Supreme Office). On some Parwanas there is no mark of this Daftar, but, in its stead, there is the seal of the Daftar-i-Khas (Special Office). This Daftar-i-Khas had appeared in Sambat 1880 with either of the seals "Akai Sahai Daftar-i-Khas, 1880" (by the favour of the Everlasting, the Special Office 1880) and "Akai Sahai Dewan Singh" under the caption "Tahrir Yaft." The seals of these Daftars preceded that of the Daftar-i-Dewan, in order of circumlocution. The third was the Daftar-i-Moharyana which came in Sambat 1891 with the seal "Akai Sahai Mohar Daftar-i-Mubarik 1879", under the caption "Mohar-in-Mutabiq-i-Amar-i-Ala shud" (this seal is inscribed according to the supreme command) or "Sabt Sarishta-i-Moharyani" recorded in the Office of Seals). The seal of this Daftar found a place between those of "Daftar-i-Mu'ala" and "Daftar-i-Dewani." The fourth was the Daftar-i-Roznamcha which came in Sambat 1878 with the seal "Abdul Karim." Between the Daftars of Shankar Das and Beli Ram came in two more Daftars in Sambat 1878,



namely "Daftar-i-Roznamcha" with the seal "Abdul Karim" under the caption "Sabt Sarishta-i-Shahzada, 1878" (recorded in the Office of the Prince, 1878).

On survey of the Parwanas from Sambat 1876 to Sambat 1889 it is observed that, as time went on, one or other of the various Daftars dropped out of the chain of circumlocution, till, towards the end of the Maharaja's reign, there is one seal namely either that of "Kirpa Ram, 1864" or of "Har Sukh Rai" the Keeper of the Maharaja's private Signet.

## II

### Financial Administrations

Maharaja Ranjit Singh himself, as we know, was the centre of whole governmental system, and was assisted by a Chief Minister and a number of Dewans, Toshakhaniahs, and Munshis who administered different departments of the State. The accounts of his revenue receipts and of expenditure were at first kept by Rama Nand, a banker of Amritsar, who held the Octroi of Amritsar and farmed the salt mines of Pind Dadan Khan. It was in 1808, when Bhawani Dass came into his service and was appointed the finance minister, that the State Treasury was properly organized. Dewan Bhawani Das divided the financial transactions into the following Daftars :

#### (i) *Daftar-i-Abwab-ul-Mal (Daftar-i-Maliyat)*

This department dealt with the accounts of the revenue receipts and was sub-divided into :

##### (a) *Jam'a Kharch-i-Taaluqat*

##### (b) *Jam'a Kharch-i-Sairat*

The *Taaluqat* section comprised entries referring to the land revenue, while *Sairat* included all other sources of income, the most important being *Nazrana* (tributes and presents), *Zabti* (escheats and forfeitures), *Abkari* (excise), *Wajuhat-i-Moqarari* (registration fees), and *Chaukiyat* (customs and transit duties).

*Nazrana* was a tribute paid to the supreme ruler of a state on different occasions and under various circumstances by his subjects, specially by prominent vassals and dignitaries. Sometimes it was in the form of a fixed annual charge from a subordinate chieftain. Sometimes it was the price paid to the conqueror for the retention of a piece of territory by a defeated prince. Sums of money and various kinds of valuables, occasionally paid to the Sikh ruler by his own

officials, may be included in this category.

*Zabti* formed a source of considerable income to the Sikh ruler, who often punished his delinquent officials with fines or forfeitures of property, or both. Besides, in several cases, he withdrew grants of land from the descendants of his deceased Sardars. These were sometimes retained by the State, while sometimes they were regranted to others in lieu of cash payment.

*Abkari* included all charges made on the sale of opium, bhang, spirits and other drugs. The income derived from this source was comparatively insignificant.

*Wajuhat-i-Moqarari* included both the profits of justice and charges corresponding to the stamp duties of modern times. The receipts under this head were collected in different ways. First of all, certain charges were made for the redress of grievances by means of judicial decisions. Fines paid to atone for criminal acts provided another item which may be put under this head, for the sake of convenience. Then there were the proceeds from various charges levied on petitions addressed by the people either to the Sikh ruler or to one of his ministers. Lastly we may include the payments made for the affixation of the Royal Seals, on all kinds of private contracts.

As regards *Chaukiyat*, I find that as in every other Indian state there was a very comprehensive scale of duties which were levied, in this case, under as many as forty-eight different heads. An examination of the scale of charges shows, however, that no discrimination was made between articles of luxury and those which formed the necessities of life. The charges were generally made in cash. Steinbach, whose opinion should command special respect on account of his long association with the government of Ranjit Singh, says : "Yet the duties, though levied at every ten or twelve miles, are light. To save themselves the trouble of constantly recurring payments, the merchants generally contract for the conveyance of a caravan of their goods from one point of the country to another, the party who takes charge of them paying all duties in the states through which they pass ; should any chief, however, impose a vexatious tax, the conductor of the caravan has the option of changing the route, and conveying the goods through the possessions of one who has the power to protect, and the inclination to encourage the transit of traffic through his dominions."

(ii) *Daftar-i-Abwab-ul-Tahwil*

This was the second department organized by Dewan Bhawani Dass

soon after his appointment in 1808, and was concerned with the records of accounts of income and expenditure sent by officials. These cashiers were called *Tahwildars*, the term being applied to any individual with whom the government money was deposited, or through whom it was expended. At first this department dealt with accounts of a varied nature, including incomes derived from different sources and expenses incurred in numerous ways. But when separate offices to record income and expenditure of different branches of the administration were set up, the work of this office became more limited.

(iii) *Daftar-i-Tauzihat*

This Daftar attended to the accounts of the royal household, such as the expenses of the Zenana (ladies), presents and Khilaats (robes of honour), entertainments of guests and *Toshakhana* (regalia).

(iv) *Daftar-i-Mawajib*

In this office, the accounts of pay and other emoluments in the various government departments, such as the army, the civil staff, the clerical establishment, and the menials were kept. This department was gradually divided into several branches to deal with the increasing volume of work.

(v) *Daftar-i-Roznamcha-i-Ikhrajat*

This office was set up to register accounts of daily expenditure under various heads. Hence it dealt with miscellaneous items from this standpoint.

These Daftars passed through several changes concerning details of organisation in subsequent years. Each of them was subdivided into branches to cope with the administrative developments. Towards the end of Ranjit Singh's reign, there were twelve principal Daftars in existence at Lahore. Each of these was controlled by one or other of the prominent courtiers, and worked more or less under the personal direction of the ruler.<sup>5</sup>

### III

#### Territorial Division and Local Government

For purposes of local administration, the Punjab was divided into following four *Subas* (provinces):

1. Lahore

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5. Shahamat Ali, *The Sikhs and Afghans*, p. 15.

2. Multan

3. Kashmir

4. Peshawar

In addition to these, there were several hilly principalities owing allegiance to the Maharaja, and paying him annual tribute.

Each of the *Subas* was divided into *Parganas*, each *Pargana* into *T'aluqas*, and every *T'aluqa* was composed of 50 to 100 *Mauzas*. This territorial division followed largely the system of the Mughals, and seems originally to have been based on considerations of administrative convenience, such as the tribal or professional affinity of the inhabitants, and the facility for collecting revenue and maintaining law and order.<sup>6</sup>

The administration of the *Suba* was entrusted to a *Nazim* (Governor) whose duties were analogous to those of the Lieutenant-Governor before the Reforms. He had under him a number of *Kardars* (officials). There was usually one *Kardar* to every *T'aluqa*, but, in certain cases, where it consisted of an exceptionally large number of villages, there were more than one.<sup>7</sup> Thus the *Kardars* widely differed in position and importance according to the extent of territory under their charge. In fact, the most important official in the sphere of local government was the *Kardar* rather than the *Nazim*. The *Nazim* doubtlessly occupied a much higher position than that of an average *Kardar*, but his functions were largely of an appellate character and of a more general nature. The *Kardar*, on the other hand, like an average civil servant of to-day, came into immediate contact with the people in their daily activities. The chief among his multifarious duties may be briefly summed up. He was

- (1) A Revenue Collector and Supervisor of land settlement
- (2) A Treasurer and Accountant
- (3) A Judge and Magistrate
- (4) An Excise and Customs Officer
- (5) A General Supervisor of the people on behalf of the

Government.

6. A *Parganna* roughly corresponded to a district, a *T'aluqa* to a Tehsil, and a *Mauza* to a village of modern Indian administration.

7. To every *T'aluqa*, at least one *Kotwal* (police officer) was attached. In large cities and important stations *Qil'adars* or *Faujdars* (garrison officers) were stationed with a small force. These officials were responsible for the maintenance of law and order.

It is true that there were—as there are to-day, though in a slightly different form—cases in which the *Kardars* or other officials were responsible for the oppression of the cultivators, but such cases were not the rule but only exceptions. Most of the contemporary writers praise the conduct of certain *Kardars* and *Nazims* very highly and hold the view that 'their measures were a blessing to the peasantry.' The author of the *Tarikh-i-Mulk-i-Hazara* describes in detail how the *regime* of Sardar Amar Singh Majithia, the Governor of Hazara, was of a great advantage to that district and was extremely popular. This is all the more important as Hazara was one of the districts on the frontier where the administration on the whole was a very difficult problem. Misar Rup Lal of Jullundur has been described as 'an able and humane ruler, true to his word and engagements, loved by the cultivators and dreaded by evil doers. A better man could not have been chosen.' 'It is refreshing,' says a writer, 'to meet with a man like Misar Rup Lal, upright and just, whose name is to this day remembered by the people with respect and affection.' The name of Dewan Sawan Mall of Multan needs no introduction to the students of history. Within a short time he succeeded in introducing into his *Suba* agricultural reforms of a far reaching character, and thereby changing the whole appearance of the country.

On the authority of various European writers who have left us accounts of Misar Rup Lal, Sawan Mal, Amar Singh Majithia and Lehna Singh Majithia, we know that ample attention was paid by the local officials to the welfare of the people by means of remissions of revenue for failure of crops, advancement of *Taqavi* loans for encouraging cultivation, security the tenure of lands, and systematic grading of revenue charges based on the fertility of the soil and means of irrigation,

#### IV

#### Judicial Arrangements

The first point to be borne in mind is that there was no written system of laws in existence in the days of Ranjit Singh. Judicial decisions were made in accordance with customary principles. The procedure was direct and simple, there being no distinction between ordinary civil and criminal cases. The settlement of village disputes rested largely with the Panchayats. The word Panchayat means a

Court of Five,<sup>8</sup> that being the usual number of men composing it. It consisted of the Panches or elders of the village. The qualifications necessary for its membership were the possession of land, and a certain amount of local influence and prestige. The Panchayat, in reality, was more often of the nature of an Arbitration Court than that of a state-appointed judicial tribunal. Hence its decisions were revised by the Kardars whenever they were rejected by either party. In the towns, justice was administered by the *Kardars* who also decided the more important cases within their T<sup>al</sup>uqas arising from disputes concerning matters of inheritance, boundaries of land, and payment of revenue. In the cities such cases were decided by the Nazims or by the more important *Kardars*, and sometimes separate officials were appointed to devote themselves exclusively to judicial work. These latter were known as *Adaltis* (Justices). A distinct Court was set up at the capital known as *Adalt-i-Ala*<sup>9</sup> (High Court). How this Court was constituted, who the judges were, or to what its jurisdiction extended is not known to history. Its name, however, suggests that it was probably an Appellate Court, analogous to a High Court of the present day. In addition to these local and central courts, judicial authority was delegated by the Sikh ruler to his prominent ministers, for deciding cases pertaining to their own respective departments. Finally the Sikh ruler himself held his Durbar at the Metropolis and heard appeals and petitions against the judgements of the *Kardars*, *Nazims*, *Adaltis* and ministers.

Civil cases were of a varied nature. First of all, there were cases of betrothals and matrimonial engagements, which were decided by the *Panchayats* in accordance with the generally accepted social conventions. Then there were breaches of contracts incidental to loans,

8. Malcolm calls the Panchayat the "Court of Five," and says that "They are always chosen from the men of the best reputation," and that "this Court has a high character for justice," vide *Sketch*, pp. 127-28. For detailed information regarding the working of the Panchayats, see his *Memoirs of Central India*. The Council of Regency, established in the Punjab after the First Sikh War, regarded the administration of justice by the Panches as so satisfactory that they entrusted to them the task of drawing up a code of customary laws as regards marriage, inheritance and other similar topics. The institution of Panchayats was so popular that the people called it *Panch Men Parmeshwar* (the decision of the Panches has the sanction of God) and readily accepted its rulings. Vide *Lahore Political Dairies*, 1847-48, by Colonel Henry and Sir John Lawrence.
9. Sohan Lal, *Tarikh-i-Ranjit Singh*, f. 559. The author himself was appointed a clerk in this Court, but he says nothing of the cases that came before it.

sales on credit and the like; and in these decisions, great importance was attached to the sworn testimony of witnesses. In such matters the government of Ranjit Singh levied fees on the successful party; though contrary to the modern practice, such fees were levied after the judgements were announced. There were, again, numerous civil suits pertaining to the alienation of landed property among the rural population. Those were decided on the evidence obtained from the records which were regularly kept in *Qazikhana*s<sup>10</sup> (local record offices) in charge of the *Nazims*. Those who succeeded in their cases paid the *Shukrana* (thanks giving present). Where there was no *Prima facie* case for defence in a civil suit, the defendant suffered a fine for wasting the time of the Court by carrying on vexatious litigation. Thus the administration of justice was a source of considerable income to the State. Punishment for murder or other physical injuries was meted out to the offenders more often in the form of fines than of bodily suffering. Mutilation was employed only in exceptional cases. On the whole, it may be said that the vigour of punishment depended upon the nature of the crime. Nor should we forget the important bearing of the locality in which the crime was committed. For example, the crimes perpetrated in the turbulent province of Peshawar were punished more heavily than those committed in the Central Punjab. This is evident from the accounts of European travellers, who saw cases of mutilation on the frontiers more frequently than in the *Suba* of Lahore.

Though to all outward appearances, Ranjit Singh's judicial system was crude and simple—not more crude and simple than that prevailing in other Indian States—yet in actual practice it eminently suited the social and political environment of the people of the Punjab. Under a system of administration in which the idea of the *separation of powers* was totally absent, one would expect to find instances of miscarriage of justice. Still the abuse of authority on the part of local official was limited by several considerations. First of all, the term of office of Ranjit Singh's officials depended on good behaviour. The consciousness that their dignity, prestige and social status, and even their private wealth and property, depended solely on the favour of their master, acted as a restraining influence on their arbitrary actions. Secondly, the Maharaja's frequent and unexpected tours introduced a real risk of complaints of bribery and corruption reaching his ears.

10. Towards the end of the Maharaja's reign, the *Qazikhana*s were established in most of the *Taluqas*. The method of keeping records is stated to have been efficient.

Indeed such complaints often came to his notice on these occasions. Another factor contributing to the same result was the practice of deputing special justices to tour in different districts for the purpose of hearing complaints and deciding cases of particular importance. *Tarikh-i-Ranjit Singh* by Sohan Lal gives striking examples as to how Ranjit Singh issued strict orders to some *Jagirdars* to send the reports of their decisions to him regularly. In the *Risala-i-Sahib Numa* by Ganesh Das, the author mentions in detail how after 1823 Ranjit Singh devoted most of his time to visiting different districts and busying himself with the examination of decisions and hearing complaints against the corruption of officials. That the judicial processes in civil and criminal actions were not dilatory and expensive was another feature that was very agreeable to the rural and agricultural population of the Punjab. The greatest merit of the system lay, however, in its simplicity and in the absence of those legal intricacies and technicalities, which if introduced among the simple Sikh peasantry, would have beset the path of justice with unavoidable difficulties. In this connection it is interesting to note the view entertained by a Sikh priest, and expressed to Malcolm in the course of a conversation. Malcolm says that this priest, with a typical patriotic prejudice, boasted of the equitable nature of the judicial system of the Sikhs, which he considered to be much superior to that of the English. He described the latter as tedious, expensive and vexatious and advantageous only to clever rogues. Malcolm himself held the view that the Sikh system was "most congenial to the temper of the people."<sup>11</sup>

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11. Malcolm, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-28.



## Alexander Burnes Mission to Maharaja Ranjit Singh\*

THOMAS HENRY THORNTON

When Lord Amherst returned to Europe in 1828, he carried with him the shawl tent presented by Runjeet Singh to the King of England, and it was determined to send from England a return present, and a very extraordinary selection was made; upon whose advice, has not transpired. It was resolved to send to Runjeet, on the part of His Majesty, a team of cart-horses, four mares and one stallion, upon some notion that, in his love for horses, Runjeet must be a breeder of the animal, and would be well pleased to have mares of large size to cross with the breeds of the Punjab. The fact, however, is, that Runjeet had no breeding stud nor establishment, and cared only for entire horses of high courage, well broken in to the *manege* of Hindustan, that he could ride himself, on parade or on the road, or set his choice sirdars and favourites upon. The result shewed this; for when the cart-horses arrived at his court, the stallion was immediately put into the breaker's hands, and taught the artificial paces usual. This animal with its enormous head and coarse legs, stood always in the palace-yard, or before the tent of the chief, decorated with a golden saddle and necklaces of precious stones, and was sometimes honoured by being crossed by Runjeet Singh himself. The mares were never looked at, and were matters of absolute indifference to the Sikh. It is, however, an anticipation to state what happened on the arrival of the animals, their adventures on the road to Lahore involved matters of higher interest.

It was resolved to make the transmission of this present a means of obtaining information in regard to the Indus, and the facilities, or the contrary, it might offer to navigation. The recent successes of Russia in Persia, and the probability of that power entertaining

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\*Culled from the *History of Punjab and of the Rise, Progress and Present Condition of the Sect and Nation of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, reprint, Language Department, Punjab, Patiala, 1970, pp. 92-116.

further designs, either present, or hereafter, when the succession of Abbas Meerza to the throne of Persia<sup>1</sup> might render that kingdom a province of Russia, made it desirable that intelligence should be collected, as to the frontier states of India, and the means of defence offered by this great river barrier in particular. The dray-horses were accordingly sent out to Bombay, and the supreme government instructed Sir John Malcolm, the governor of that presidency, to take measures to have them forwarded under charge of an intelligent and prudent officer, in boats up the Indus. Some demur was anticipated on the part of the rulers of Sind to allowing them a passage through the Delta and lower part of the river; but it was assumed that the governing Meers, situated as they were relatively to Runjeet Singh on one hand, and the British Government on the other, would not readily incur the risk of offending both powers, by refusing a passage, if it were insisted upon.

Sir John Malcolm, having received the horses, forwarded them to Cutch, and appointed to the mission to Lahore, in charge of them, Lieutenant (afterwards Sir Alexander) Burnes, then assistant to Colonel (now Sir Henry) Pottinger, who was in political charge of that district and of the British relations with Sind. The young officer thus selected had been in the Quarter-Master General's department, and was in every respect qualified for the duty. Sir John Malcolm added to the dray-horses the present of a carriage of his own, as useless an article to Runjeet as the mares. The highly ornamental carriage sent to him by Lord Minto, in 1810, after being used for a few days as a novel plaything, had ever since remained neglected in the great arsenal at Lahore. The carriage and horses, however, were despatched from Cutch towards the end of the year 1830, and Sir John Malcolm thought the most politic course would be, to send them without previous notice or correspondence with the Meers of Sind, thinking the necessity they would thus be under of deciding suddenly would be likely to contribute to the success of the expedition.

Lieutenant Burnes accordingly started, carrying with him the letters announcing the purpose of his coming, and entered with his fleet one of the mouths of the Indus. Passing up to the first inhabited town, he forwarded his despatches to Hyderabad. After a detention of some days, he was, on the 1st February, met by an officer and guard from

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1. Abbas Meerza died in 1834.

Darajee, who requested him to wait at the mouth of the river till orders should arrive from Hyderabad. With this he complied, but there experienced so much incivility from the Kurachee [Karachi] people, who relieved the guard from Darajee, that he resolved to return and wait in Cutch till the Meers should decide upon his coming. The consent of the Meers was not, however, obtained till after a negotiation of nearly six weeks; at length Lieutenant Burnes sailed again on the 10th March, and on this occasion entered the Ruchel mouth by Kurachee Bundur, the extreme western channel of the river. Here difficulties were made, and delays interposed, so as to induce Lieutenant Burnes to start by land for Hyderabad, in the hope of removing them by personal negotiation. He had proceeded no further than Tatta [Thatta], when, after much chicanery he received the required permission to pass by the route of the Indus. Boats of the country were now furnished to him, and every possible assistance rendered for his conveyance to Hyderabad; no effort being spared to obliterate the effects of the previous unfriendly treatment he had experienced. At the capital he was received in Durbar with great distinction, a chief of rank was appointed to attend him on his journey, and the best accommodation boats on the river, even those of the ruling Meer himself, were assigned for his conveyance. Everywhere in Sinde he met with the same attention, and proceeded on his voyage by Tatta to Hyderabad, and thence after a short stay to Bukur. The mission reached Tatta on the 15th and Hyderabad on the 18th April, 1831, and the month of May had closed before it left the Indus, and entered the Chenab. The river was then at its lowest, but nowhere was there the slightest difficulty or obstruction to the navigation.

Sinde was then divided into three independent governments: the first, and by far the most considerable, was Hyderabad, ruled at this time by Meer Moorad Ali, last survivor of the four brothers, who, in 1780, effected the revolution which transferred the dominion of the country to the Talpoor family. The second division was that of Khyrpoor, to the north of the first, and lying on both sides of the river Indus. Its ruler was Meer Roostam Khan, the eldest son of Meer Soohrab Khan. The third division was that of Meerpoor, lying towards Cutch, and ruled by Meer Ali Moorad Khan. These sub-divisions of the country had their origin in a partition made amongst the principal conspirators, by whose exertions the Talpoors obtained power.

Having passed through the Hyderabad territory, Lieutenant Burnes

was received with even increased attention and kindness by the ruler of Khyrpoor, who professed a strong desire to cultivate a more intimate relation with the British Government, and made Lieutenant Burnes the bearer of a communication to this effect to the Governor-General. By this chief the mission was carried forward to the territory of the Nuwab of Bahawulpur, without experiencing the smallest obstruction or difficulty of any kind : there was found nowhere less than eight feet of water, and the current was moderate, and easily overcome, even where, from rocks, or hard soil at the banks, the water-way was contracted. The month of May was now passing, during which the navigation of the Ganges is much obstructed by strong westerly winds, and by the want of water, but no difficulty of the kind impeded the passage up the Indus at this season. The Bahawulpur chief was already in political relation, both with Runjeet Singh and with the British Government ; from him, therefore, Lieutenant Burnes was sure of receiving every kindness. On the 30th May, the fleet reached Mittunkot [Mithankot], and embarking on other boats provided by the chief of the Daoodputras (Bahawul Khan), entered the Punjnud, being the united stream of the waters of the Punjab. A little below Multan, the escort and party sent by Runjeet to receive and conduct the royal<sup>2</sup> present met Lieutenant Burnes with boats of the Punjab, adapted to the navigation of the winding Ravi. In these Lieutenant Burnes and his party embarked on the 12th June, and soon reached Multan. The mouth of the Ravi is further up the Sutluj, and he did not enter that branch till the 23rd June. The rainy season overtook the mission while in that river, and the progress up it was tedious, being dependent entirely on the track-rope.

On the 17th of July, Lieutenant Burnes reached Lahore, where his arrival with the present from the King of England, and with the letter of Lord Ellenborough which accompanied it, was a source of great pride and rejoicing to Runjeet Singh. The attention he paid to Lieutenant Burnes was very marked, and he had invited Captain Wade over from

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2. It is a singular circumstance, that Sir J. Malcolm, in all the instructions he gave Lieutenant-Colonel Pottinger and Lieutenant Burnes, in regard to this mission, never mentioned, nor gave the smallest intimation to either officer, that the dray-horses were a present from the King of England. They made the discovery after the difficulties in respect to the passage through Sind had been overcome, when a direct correspondence with the mission was opened by the Governor-General. Up to this time, they had believed, and had represented, the present to be sent from the British Government in India.

Lodiana [Ludhiana], to assist at the ceremonial of reception. From Lahore, Lieutenant Burnes proceeded to Simla, to render to the Governor-General an account of his mission, and to lay before his lordship the valuable information obtained during it. This enterprising and zealous officer obtained his lordship's permission to return to his presidency of Bombay through Persia, and to explore the route of Balkh and Bokhara, after first crossing the Punjab and Cabul territory, in order that he might be the means of adding information of this little-known route to the stores of intelligence already contributed by him.

The very favourable disposition in which the ruler of Lahore seemed to be at this juncture encouraged Lord William Bentinck to hope, that a proposition for a personal meeting between himself and Runjeet Singh would be well received. He accordingly instructed Captain Wade, when at Lahore, to sound the chief's confidential advisors on the subject. As anticipated by his lordship, Runjeet shewed great desire for the meeting, but some difficulty was at first started in respect to the etiquette of a previous return mission, Runjeet Singh having paid his lordship the complement of sending one, similarly composed to that which waited on Lord Amherst. The mission had been received by Lord William Bentinck in April, soon after his arrival at Simla ; its members were the Dewan Mootee Ram, son of Mohkam Chand, Huree Singh [Hari Singh] sirdar, and the secretary, Fakir Uzeez-ud-deen [Faqir Aziz-ud-Din]. They had been treated by the Governor-General with much distinction, and a return mission of some of the principal officers of his lordship's suite had been promised, or rather held out in expectation. The personal meeting between the heads of the two states would necessarily deprive Runjeet Singh of this compliment ; for, in the first place, the time would scarcely allow of both, seeing that the intended journey of the Governor-General to Ajmer and Rajpootana required, that, if arranged at all, the interview should take place before the end of October, and in the second, if a formal mission were sent, immediately before the meeting, it would have the appearance, in the eyes of the world, of being sent to supplicate or induce the ruler of the Sikhs to come to the interview, whereas the rank and position of the head of the British Government required that the honour of a personal conference with him should be sought.

With a liberality, not inconsistent with his general character, Runjeet Singh, having made up his mind to the interview, gave up the point of etiquette, and preparation was made on both sides for the meeting to take place on the Sutluj about the 20th of October, without

any previous return mission ; the neighbourhood of Roopur [Ropar] as subsequently fixed upon as the most appropriate and convenient spot for the meeting.

In order to give eclat to the occasion, and to form a suitable escort, the Governor-General ordered up to Roopur, from Meerut and Kurnal [Karnal], two squadrons of European lancers with the mounted band of the regiment (H.M. 16th Lancers), an European regiment (H.M. 31st foot), two battalions of native infantry (the 14th and 32nd), and eight guns of horse artillery, with two squadrons of Colonel Skinner's irregular horse. The escort was thus composed, in order to exhibit to Runjeet Singh, whose curiosity was much excited as to the formation and equipment of the various arms and corps of our military force, as much variety as possible. In marching the Europeans through the Sikh territory, the population was some what scandalized at ascertaining that beef was killed in camp for their rations. The slaughter was made in the night, as secretly as possible ; still the fact transpired, and became matter of complaint from the Sikh sirdars. The reply to them was, that it was no business of theirs to inquire what was done within the precincts of a British camp ; that our customs prevailed there, and these could not be yielded so their scruples, though every care should be taken to prevent the obtrusion of any thing that was offensive. There is no doubt that the prejudices of the Sikhs were much outraged by the slaughter of oxen, but it would have been extremely bad policy to yield the point in this instance ; for were it conceded, and the necessity to arise hereafter (as it has arisen), of brining a considerable force of Europeans into the country, a similar concession would be expected when it would be impossible to grant it and the population would be excited, from the want of previous knowledge and preparation, and the recollection that heretofore the concession had been made to their religious feelings.

The troops having arrived at Roopur, the Governor-General, who had left Simla on the 19th October, entered the camp on the evening of the 22nd. Runjeet Singh came into his camp, on the opposite side of the Sutluj, on the morning of the 25th, escorted by 10,000 of his best horse, and about 6,000 trained infantry. He was immediately waited upon by a deputation from the Governor-General, headed by Major-General Ramsay, brother to the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Dalhousie, and by his lordship's principal secretary. Koonwur Khuruk Singh, with six principal sirdars of the Sikhs, came at the same time to present the Maharaja's compliments to the Governor-General.

It was arranged that Runjeet Singh should visit the Governor-General next day in the morning.

As the time approached for the meeting, Runjeet began to entertain an apprehension that some treachery or foul play must be designed : late overnight, he sent M. Allard to say that he should not attend the meeting of the morrow. M. Allard waited upon him immediately, and exerted himself to remove these suspicions and restore confidence, offering to stake his own head that nothing would happen that was disagreeable. He left the Maharaja still irresolute, and the astrologers were summoned. They consulted the *Grant'h* and declared the result favourable, but told his Highness to take with him a couple of apples, and to present them to the Governor-General and to his secretary : if they were at once taken without demur, he was to consider it as a good omen and might proceed in full assurance that the result of the meeting would give him satisfaction. On the morning of the 26th October, a deputation went to conduct the Maharaja to camp, and he started at sunrise. A bridge of the flat-bottomed ferry-boats of the Sutluj had been constructed for the convenience of communication. Runjeet Singh made to cross over before him 3,000 of his best Ghorchur cavalry, dressed in new yellow silk quilted coats, also about 800 of M. Allard's dragoons ; he then took his breakfast of a highly spiced cordial, and sent over the chiefs he meant should attend on their elephants. This occupied some time, for the boats were fragile and would allow but few elephants to be put on the bridge together. Lastly, His Highness passed over in person, and then, to prevent all confusion, ordered the guard at the bridge to permit none else from his camp to cross over. With the escort and attendance thus formed, the Sikh chief crossed the open plain, at the further end of which lay the camp of the Governor-General, from the centre of which a street was formed of the British troops collected. On reaching the end of line, the Maharaja stopped to examine each corps, and put an infinity of questions as to their equipment, asking the use and cost of every strange article that caught his eye. In the middle of the street he was met by the Governor-General, and presented the apples as enjoined by the astrologers : they were freely and at once taken. His Highness then crossed into the Governor-General's houda, and the two chiefs proceeded together to the tents of audience that had been prepared. In an outer tent, all the European gentlemen were collected, and Runjeet Singh was detained in it a short time, that several of them might be presented to him, standing, as he passed through. In a

further tent chairs were laid out, and the Maharaja, with the chiefs of his nomination, and some select officers of the suite, was led thither by the Governor-General for a more private conference. It was amusing to see the pains taken by Runjeet in the arrangement of his part of the ceremony. He waited at the door of the outer tent, and himself called and told off the chiefs that were to proceed to the inner, making them precede himself in order to prevent confusion or crowding. They were all like himself, dressed in yellow, that and light green being the favourite colours of his court, and called *Busunttee* [*Basanti*], or the colours of spring. Some wore elegant, highly-polished armour, with scarfs of this colour, and the splendour of the attire of all was very striking. The inquisitive and apparently frank manner of the Sikh chief made the conference pass off with more liveliness than is usual on such occasions of ceremony. Presents of every variety of manufactured stuffs, which had previously been sent for, from Calcutta, Dacca, and Benares, with guns and jewels of value, a fine Burmese elephant, and two select thorough-bred young horses from the Hissar stud, were laid out or passed in review before His Highness. Dresses of honour and presents were also laid out for the heir-apparent, and other chiefs, according to a list obtained from His Highness. The Maharaja examined carefully every article of his own present, and then sent for the keeper of his wardrobe and desired him to receive charge and pack up the articles forthwith. He took his leave, apparently highly pleased with the interview, and at the door of the tent, called up and paraded before the Governor-General, his own favourite horses, telling the names and merits of each. Again, as he passed through the street of troops, he stopped to examine the different corps, and his inquiries into every minute particular were renewed. It was noon before he reached his own camp in returning.

On the following day, the Governor-General returned the visit, and was met at the bridge of boats by Runjeet Singh. His lordship was escorted by the lancers, who, with their mounted band, preceded the cavalcade. Runjeet was much struck with their appearance, particularly with that of the band; and, after they had crossed and drawn up on the farther side of the river, he went up to them and listened for some time to their playing, while the suite crossed. The Sikh troops formed line, from the bridge to the Maharaja's tents, which, consisting chiefly of *kunats* and *sumeeanas*, tastefully arranged, were of red colour, and covered a large space. The lining of all the *sumeeanas*, under which the chairs were placed for the Governor-General and his suite, was of



shawl, beautifully worked, and that under which sat the Governor-General and His Highness himself, was a sheet of inlaid pearls and jewels of great value. The Maharaja, after the party were seated, introduced his chiefs in succession, and each, as he came forward, presented nuzurs of Dutch gold sequins, both to His Highness and to the Governor-General. The horses were again brought forth, and exhibited in superb trappings, and after an hour passed in lively conversation, the presents for the Governor-General were laid out, and his lordship took his leave.

Evening entertainments were afterwards exchanged, and reviews held of the troops collected on both sides. The Maharaja seemed particularly struck with some of the evolutions exhibited before him by the British regiments, and sent his sirdars up to the ranks to examine particularly how they were executed. He himself also went up to the squares formed by the infantry, to see how many ranks knelt, and how many kept up fire, shewing in all things a most insatiable curiosity.

On the 31st October, the last day of the interview, the Maharaja came across the river to witness some artillery practice with grape and spherical-case shot. His astonishment at the effect on the curtain at different distances, from four hundred to one thousand paces, was extreme. After amusing himself afterwards with firing at a chutur, or umbrella, with one of the six-pounders, and exhibiting feats of horsemanship and dexterity, by his sirdars, he was presented by the Governor-General with two nine-pounder horse artillery guns, with horses and equipments complete.

The evening of this day was that of the parting interview, which it was arranged was to take place at the entertainment given by the Governor-General. At Runjeet's particular request, a paper was executed and delivered to him on this occasion, promising perpetual friendship from the British Government. A complete model of an iron suspension bridge, made up at Calcutta for the purpose, was also presented to His Highness, and excited his applause and admiration. On the following morning, the 1st November, 1831, both camps broke ground, and commenced their march in opposite directions, after a week of magnificence and mutual display, reminding one of the days of "The Field of Cloth of Gold."

No business of importance was transacted at this interview; Runjeet Singh, however, invited the two officers he thought most in the Governor-General's confidence to his tent, and in the midst of much desultory conversation, put to the official secretary, who was one of

them, several questions in respect to Sind, as if desirous to open a negotiation, and concert measures, in relation to that state ; or at least to come to an understanding, as to the views of the British Government in respect to it. He said the *vukeels* [*vakils*] of Sind were attendance in his camp, and he asked if he might introduce them to the Governor-General. Upon being answered in the affirmative, he added, that it was a very rich country, and much treasure had been accumulated there, ever since Nadir Shah's invasion of Hindustan ; that there was no standing army, or any soldiers, except the population at large, who would be called from the plough to take the field against an invading force. He then made allusion to the Meers having sent back Lieutenant Burnes, and to their general character for pride and haughtiness. It appeared evident that the Maharaja had learned, or at least suspected, that the British Government had some further views in respect to Sind ; also, that nothing would be more gratifying to him than to be invited to co-operate in an attack upon that state. Notwithstanding, however, the desire thus shewn to come to an understanding on the subject, it was not thought advisable to make any communication yet to the ruler of Lahore, for it was conceived, that, if made aware of the intentions of the British Government, he might, with every profession of a desire to forward them, contrive by intrigue and secret working to counteract the negotiation.

On the very day before His Highness arrived at Roopur, instructions had been issued to Lieutenant Colonel Pottinger, to prepare for a mission to Sind, with a view to the negotiation of a commercial treaty, having for its object to open the navigation of the Indus to the trade of Europe, and of India. The negotiation was to be separate with each of the three independent Meers ; but Colonel Pottinger was directed to proceed first to Hyderabad, to arrange with Meer Moorad Ali for a free passage for vessels and merchandize through the mouths and delta of this great river. The basis of the negotiation was to be, to obtain guarantees against the levy of irregular duties, or wanton obstruction of any kind to boats and merchandize ; to offer a guarantee against loss of revenue to the Sind Government from the adoption of the scheme, and so to procure that the river Indus should become again the channel for extensive commerce, and be frequented securely by the craft and vessels of all the adjoining districts, and even of Europe. The object of entering upon this negotiation, at the particular

#### ALEXENDER BURNES MISSION TO MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH

juncture, was perhaps in some measure political, having reference to the necessity of being prepared against the possibility of designs on the part of Russia, should she succeed in establishing her influence in Persia. The Governor-General, however, was not prepared to make any avowal or display of such motives, and a commercial treaty, stipulating for the free navigation of the river, seemed to him the better form in which to open relations with the governments and chiefs who occupied its banks.

The result of this mission was, that in April 1832, treaties were made between the British Government and the Meers, stipulating that a free passage should be afforded to the merchants and traders of Hindustan by the river and roads of Sind upon payment of moderate duties.

## Secular Policy of Maharaja Ranjit Singh

A. C. ARORA\*

The word 'secular' literally means 'pertaining to the present world, or to things not spiritual;' civil not ecclesiastical; 'not concerned with religion.'<sup>1</sup> According to the American concept, secularism stands for absolute segregation between religion and the states. But in India where religious traditions have invariably been dominant characteristics of the society, secularism has a different connotation; it implies that there should be no state religion and that the state should treat all the religious equally. It is in the context of this Indian concept of secularism that this study seeks to examine the secular policy of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

The historical background of the secular policy of Ranjit Singh is very significant and in order to have a proper understanding of his policy its brief mention, here, would be helpful. At the very outset it must be borne in mind that the establishment of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's strong and glorious rule and his secular policy was based on the noble teachings of the Sikh Gurus. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, denounced with utmost vehemence, the caste systems and the taboos linked with it. The Guru accepted no distinction between the Hindus and the Muslims.<sup>2</sup> Besides visiting the celebrated Hindu places of pilgrimage, Guru Nanak visited the Muslim holy places of Mecca, Madina and Baghdad as well. Wherever he went he preached the brotherhood of mankind. On his tours he had Mardana, a low-caste Muslim, as his companion. He made commendable efforts to give a practical shape to the principle of social equality through the institutions of *sangat* and *pangat* (*langar*). Ignoring the distinctions of caste and religion Guru Nanak's successors continued preaching universal brotherhood and equality of people. It is significant to observe that at the time of compiling the *Adi Granth* Guru Arjan included in it not only the

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1. *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, Bombay, 1972, p. 1224.

2. In the words of Hari Ram Gupta, "Nanak loved all human beings irrespective of religious or geographical limits or barriers," see *History of Sikh Gurus*, New Delhi, 1973, p. 65.

compositions of the Sikh Gurus but also those of the Hindu *bhakats* and Muslim saints, thus providing a unique example in the history of the religions of the world. As is recorded in the *Bachitar Natak* by Guru Gobind Singh, the ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed his life for the sake of *tilak* (distinctive mark on the forehead) and *janeu* (sacred thread of the Hindus), that is, for the protection of Hinduism. In history we can pick up good many examples of such people as laid down their lives for their own religion but we hardly come across such great men as Guru Tegh Bahadur who suffered martyrdom for the protection of the religion of others. It may be emphasized here that the Guru sacrificed his life for the sake of human rights of freedom of worship and freedom of conscience. Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa and exhorted his followers not to have faith in caste system and invidious distinctions of religion. He said :

He (God) is in the temple as He is in the mosque.

He is in the Hindu worship as he is in the Muslim prayer.

Men are one though, they appear different.<sup>3</sup>

Guru Gobind Singh's devout Sikh Bhai Kanaihya made no distinction between a Sikh and a Muslim at the time of providing water to the wounded soldiers in the battle-field. The Guru was pleased with his conduct and asked him to apply balm also to the wounded soldiers irrespective of their religions. Since Maharaja Ranjit Singh had deep faith in the teachings of the Gurus, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and the *Khalsa*, it was natural that the liberal principles of Sikhism should mould his policy accordingly.

According to Fauja Singh, Punjabi culture deeply influenced the personality and policies of Ranjit Singh.<sup>4</sup> The Aryans, Greeks, Sythians, Kushans, Huns, Turks, Pathans and Mughals came from foreign lands and settled in the Punjab. Their commingling with one another gave birth to Punjabi culture. There was lot of development of Punjabi language and literature upto the end of the eighteenth century. Besides the Sikh Gurus many Hindu bhakats (as Chhajju, Kahna and Wali Ram), Sufi saints (as Shaikh Ibrahim Sani, Madho Lal Husain, Sultan Bahu, Shah Sharaf, Buleh Shah and Ali Haider) and Muslim poets as (Damodar, Pilo, Ahmad and Waris Shah) and Sikh scholars

3. 'Akal Ustat,' 86, *Dasam Granth*, Amritsar, 1956, p. 19.

4. Fauja Singh, *Some Aspects of State and Society under Ranjit Singh*, New Delhi, 1982, pp. 67-71.

(as Budh Singh, Sewa Singh and Gulab Singh) contributed considerably to the development of Punjabi. The common Punjabi language and its popular literature brought the people of different religions closer to one another. It resulted in their social intermingling and joint participation in the festivals of one another. Ranjit Singh was an outstanding representative of Punjabi culture and under its dominant influence he adopted the policy of secularism.

Besides the circumstantial factors as discussed above, Ranjit Singh's personal views and qualities may be regarded as an important factor that promoted him to follow a secular policy. Like emperor Akbar, Maharaja Ranjit Singh was an unlettered but intelligent man and a wise statesman. The contemporary foreign travellers like Baron Hugel and Victor Jacquemont and the contemporary European officials, like Murray, Orlich and Osborne were deeply influenced by the unusual ability, understanding, wisdom, statesmanship and firm determination of the Maharaja.<sup>5</sup>

It seems that Ranjit Singh had realised immediately after assuming charge of the Sukarchakia Misal that in order to establish a strong and far-flung kingdom in the Punjab he must follow a liberal and magnanimous policy towards the non-Sikhs who were in majority. In the Sikh kingdom, which extended from Satluj to Khaibar, the Muslims formed the two-third of the total population and the Hindus and the Sikhs constituted the remaining one third.<sup>6</sup>

The Maharaja adopted lenient and sympathetic attitude towards his vanquished foes. In 1799 prominent Hindu, Sikh and Muslim citizens of Lahore, including Hakam Rai, Gurbakhsh Singh, Mian Ashaj Muhammad, Mian Mehr Mohkam Din, Muhammad Salim and Muhammad Bakar addressed an invitation to Ranjit Singh to come and conquer Lahore as its people were suffering hardships under the misrule of the Bhangi Sardars.<sup>7</sup> Ranjit Singh accepted the invitation and with

5. Orlich writes, "In energy of will, endurance and craftiness he was unequalled by any of the people." According to Victor Jacquemont, Ranjit Singh "is an old fox, compared with whom the wildest of our diplomats is a mere innocent." See H. S. Bhatia (ed.), *Rare Documents on Sikhs and their Rule in the Punjab*, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 223, 246.

6. Ali-Ud-Din Mufti, *Ibratnama* (1855), Vol. I, Lahore, 1961, p. 349; also see H. R. Gupta, 'Life and Manners of the Common People in Ranjit Singh's Punjab,' in Fauja Singh and A. C. Arora (ed.), *Maharaja Ranjit Singh: Politics, Society and Economy*, Patiala, 1984, p. 276.

7. Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Daftar II, Lahore, 1885, p. 41.

the cooperation of the citizens of Lahore he succeeded in occupying Lahore on July 7, 1799 without any difficulty. Now it became imperative for Ranjit Singh to adopt liberal attitude towards the residents of Lahore, especially the Muslims who had played a major role in putting Ranjit Singh on the *gaddi* of Lahore. He gave full religious freedom to the Musalmans and on their request restored the possession of Sunehri mosque to them which had been in the hands of the Sikhs for quite some time.<sup>9</sup> In return for the evaluation of the fort of Lahore Bhangi Sardar Chet Singh was allowed to retain possession of all his movable property and a *jagir* at Vanyeki in Amritsar district.

After this Ranjit Singh made it a principle of his policy to grant *jagirs* for the decent and comfortable living of the rulers defeated at his hands. He gave *jagirs* to the vanquished Muslim chiefs of Kasur, Jhang, Khushab, Attock, Multan, Dera Ismail Khan, Peshawar, Rasulgarh, Sahiwal and the Sikh chiefs or the widows of the Bhangis, Dallewalias, Kanaihyas, etc. For example, after the conquest of Kasur in 1807, its ruler Qutab-ud-Din was granted the *jagir* of Mamdot worth an annual income of one lakh rupees.<sup>9</sup> In the same year Jhang was occupied and its Nawab Ahmad Khan was given a *jagir* for his subsistence.<sup>10</sup> In 1810, after his defeat, the Baluch ruler Jafar Khan of Khushab was given a *jagir* for his maintenance.<sup>11</sup> In 1813, consequent upon an agreement, Jahandad Khan, governor of Attock, was given an annual *jagir* of one lakh rupees in lieu of surrendering the fort of Attock to the Maharaja. In 1818 after the conquest of Multan, the *jagir* of Sharakpur was conferred upon the late Nawab Muzzafar Khan's two sons, Sarfraz Khan and Zulfiqar Ali Khan. They were respectfully received at Lahore as guests by the Maharaja and were provided with an amount of rupees 2500.<sup>12</sup> In 1821, Ahmad Khan, the ruler of Dera Ismail Khan and Mankera was defeated but Dera Ismail Khan was allowed to be retained by the defeated ruler. At the time of annexing Peshawar in 1834, its former rulers Sultan Muhammad Khan and Pir Muhammad were given *jagirs* worth three lakh rupees

8. Muhammad Latif, *Lahore: Its History, Architectural Remains and Antiquities*, Lahore, 1891, p. 110.

9. Sohan Lal Suri, *op. cit.*, p. 64; H. L. O. Garrett (ed.) *Events at the Court of Ranjit Singh (1810-17)*, Reprint, Patiala, 1970, p. 42.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

12. Prem Singh Hoti, *Sher-i-Punjab Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, Ludhiana, 11th edition, p. 97.

annually in Kohat and Hashtnagar.<sup>13</sup> It is evident from these examples that Ranjit Singh adopted a liberal and benevolent policy towards his defeated Muslim enemies. As compared to the Muslim adversaries he was not more magnanimous and considerate towards his Sikh and Hindu opponents. Such a treatment of his enemies reflected more of his political sagacity than his kind demeanour. He was not only a brave warrior but also gifted with the qualities of a shrewd statesman. He realised that, placed as he was, he was to confront many Sikh and Muslim enemies, if he was to fulfil his ambition of being the sovereign of whole of the Punjab. As a consequence of his occupation of Lahore, some Sikh Sardars, in collaboration with the Muslim ruler of Kasur, had contracted an alliance against him. To the good luck of the Maharaja, the sudden death of Gulab Singh Bhangi had dispirited the confederate army which dispersed. The lesson which Ranjit Singh learnt from it was that in order to defeat his enemies and extend his kingdom he must be well-versed in the art of diplomacy. With this object in mind he established friendly relations with the leaders of the powerful Sikh Misals as Kanaihyas, Ahluwalias and Ramgarhias with whose help he first conquered the territories of the weaker Misals. During this period he continued sporadic attacks on the Muslim rulers also and he strengthened his army. Later at the opportune time he conquered Muslim states one by one and provided their rulers with *jagirs* for their subsistence so that their sheer penury did not drive them to revolt against the Maharaja.

In the affairs of state administration Ranjit Singh followed a secular policy. The appointments of the state officials were made, irrespective of their faith, caste and colour, on the basis of their suitability and loyalty to the state. Thus the Lahore Durbar secured the services of meritorious people professing faith in various religions which helped in giving efficient administration to the state. The prominent officials of the Maharaja belonged to different castes of India and abroad. They included Muslims, Hindus (Brahmans, Khattris and Dogras, Rajputs) and Christians from England, France, Italy, America, etc. The appointments as well as the promotions of the government officials were made only on merit and an official of any religion or caste could rise to the highest office under the government. The three Faqir brothers—Aziz-ud-Din, Nur-ud-Din and Imam-ud-Din—were among the

13. Bhagat Singh, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, Patiala, 1983, p. 51.



prominent Muslim officials of the state. To begin with Faqir Aziz-ud-Din was appointed as the personal physician of the Maharaja but due to his ability and loyalty he worked his way up to the exalted office of the Foreign Minister of the Lahore Durbar. Similarly, Faqir Nur-ud-Din became the Home Minister and Faqir Imam-ud-Din became the custodian and treasury officer of Gobindgarh fort in Amritsar. The other noted Muslim officials included Qazi Nizam-ud-Din, Mufti Muhammad Shah, Imam Bakhsh, Mian Ghaus, Sultan Muhammad and Shaikh Basawan. On the basis of his family archival records Faqir Syed Waheed-ud-Din writes that among the high Muslim officials of Maharaja Ranjit Singh there were two ministers, one governor and many district officers. In the army there were forty one high-ranking Muslim officers ; two of them generals, several of them colonels and the rest holding other important ranks. There were ninety-two Muslims who were senior officers in the police, the judiciary, the legal department and the supply and stores department.<sup>14</sup>

Three Dogra (Rajput) brothers—Dhian Singh, Gulab Singh and Suchet Singh—were posted to important offices in the Maharaja's Durbar on the basis of their ability and merit. Dhian Singh was the Prime Minister on whom the Maharaja had conferred the title of *Raja-i-Rajgan*. Raja Gulab Singh was an administrator and the commander of the forces at Jammu. Raja Suchet Singh was an important officer in cavalry. Among the Brahman officials of the Maharaja the names of Jamadar Khushal Singh, Bhaiya Ram Singh, Tej Singh, Missar Diwan Chand, Diwan Ganga Ram, Raja Dina Nath, Diwan Ajudhia Parsad, Missar Beli Ram and his four brothers (Roop Lal, Ram Krishan, Megh Raj and Sukh Raj) are worth mentioning. Jamadar Khushal Singh was, Brahman from U.P., who came to Lahore to seek employment and joined the army of the Maharaja as a foot-soldier and in due course of time he rose to the office of *Sardar-i-deorhi* or *Deorhiwala*. Bhaiya Ram Singh was Khushal Singh's brother and Tej Singh was his nephew. Missar Diwan Chand was a commander in the army who had the important conquests of Multan and Kashmir to his credit and was a recipient of the titles of *Zafarjang* and *Fateh Nusrat* from the Maharaja. Diwan Ganga Ram, a Kashmiri Brahman, was the keeper of royal seal and in charge of the military accounts office. Dina Nath, the nephew of Diwan Ganga Ram, rose from an ordinary

14. Faqir Syed Waheed-ud-Din, *The Real Ranjit Singh*, Reprint, Delhi, 1976, p. 36.

position to that of a Finance Minister because of his unusual ability and diligence. Missar Beli Ram was the custodian of *toshakhana*. The prominent Khatri officials included Diwan Mohkam Chand, Diwan Moti Ram, Diwan Ram Dayal and Diwan Sawan Mal. Diwan Mohkam Chand was the Commander-in-Chief of the Sikh forces from 1806 to 1814. His son, Moti Ram remained governor of Kashmir for many years. Diwan Ram Dyal (Mohkam Chand's grandson) was an army commander. Diwan Sawan Mal worked as governor of Multan from 1821 to 1844.

The prominent Sikh Sardars of Ranjit Singh's Durbar included Fateh Singh Ahluwalia, Sham Singh Attariwala, Hari Singh Nalwa, Desa Singh Majithia, Lehna Singh Majithia, Budh Singh Sandhanwalia, Attar Singh Sandhanwalia and Fateh Singh Kalianwala. They were brave warriors and worked either as high officials in the Sikh army or as the provincial governors. Ranjit Singh had posted to high offices many foreign Christians hailing from France, Italy, England, Germany, Austria, America, etc. Their number was around sixty and most prominent among them were Ventura, Allard, Court and Avitabile. Ventura was an Italian who had served in Napoleon's army as Colonel. He organised the Sikh infantry and *Fauj-i-Khas* efficiently. He creditably served in the Maharaja's campaigns in the north-west frontier. Allard and Court were French who re-organised Ranjit Singh's cavalry and artillery on European pattern respectively. Avitabile was an Italian who was first posted to Wazirabad and later to Peshawar as governor.

According to Gulshan Lal Chopra, Ranjit Singh had a commendable quality of selecting suitable persons for government jobs. "He selected the right men for right place, and attached much importance to the hereditary instincts and traditions of the various classes of his subjects."<sup>15</sup> For example, he knew it very well that the *jats* of Majha were brave and intrepid and the fighting arm of the state. Therefore, generally, he gave them high posts in the army and not in the civil administration. He entrusted the charge of finance and various departments of the Secretariat to the Hindus, particularly the Brahmans who were considered most suitable for these offices. One of the objects of the Maharaja in appointing persons belonging to different religions

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15. Gulshan Lal Chopra, *The Punjab as a Sovereign State*, Hoshiarpur, 2nd ed., 1960, p. 135.

and castes on government jobs was that the employees of one community could exercise checks on those of the other, thus preventing any of them from indulging in conspiracy or revolt against the Lahore Durbār.<sup>16</sup> According to J.D. Cunningham, the Maharaja had placed himself in some degree in opposition to the Sikh people, so he sought for strangers to strengthen his position.<sup>17</sup> Similarly K.C. Khanna has written that the Maharaja did not want to create unnecessary rivals from amongst his own co-religionists. He kept the Sikh Sardars from occupying very high positions. And he sought to make up this deficiency by employing talented people of all kinds and countries.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever be the reasons, the Maharaja by appointing suitable persons belonging to different faiths and castes on government jobs gave a concrete proof of his secularism and statesmanship. The Maharaja conferred titles on his officials without taking into consideration their religions and castes. He gave the respectable titles like *afzal didar*, *ujjal didar*, *nirmal budh*, *Sardar-i-bawakar*, *hisbar-i-jang*, *Shujab-ul-daulah*, *general-i-awal*, *itmud-ud-daulah*, *mubark-ul-mulk*, *amanat panah*, *dilawar jang* and *safdar jang bahadur*, to Attar Singh Sandhanwalia, Lehna Singh Majithia, Kanwar Sher Singh, Bhai Gobind Ram, Tej Singh, Avitabile, etc.<sup>19</sup> Ram Singh, Gujjar Singh, Ventura, Tej Singh, Ajit Singh, Court, Missar Sukh Raj and Mian Udham Singh were given the title/rank of general.<sup>20</sup> In 1837, on the occasion of the marriage of grandson, Kanwar Naunihal Singh, an award of *kokab-i-Iqbal-i-Punjab* was introduced on the English pattern. It had three grades and each had a separate gold medal. To begin with, this award was conferred on Henry Fane and later on the princes and Raja Dhian Singh, Raja Gulab Singh, Raja Suchet Singh, Jamadar Khushal Singh, Attar Singh Sandhanwalia, Lehna Singh Majithia, Diwan Sawan Mal, Raja Dina Nath, Avitabile, Allard, Court, Faqir Aziz-ud-Din, Ilahi Bakhsh, etc., were honoured with the award of these medals. Most of the titles had

16. For details, see Fauja Singh, *op cit.*, pp. 97-125.

17. J. D. Cunningham, *A History of the Sikhs* (ed. H. L. O. Garrett), New Delhi, 1966, p. 160.

18. K. C. Khanna, 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh As a Nation Builder,' Teja Singh and Ganda Singh (ed.), *Maharaja Ranjit Singh: First Death Centenary Memorial*, Amritsar, 1939, p. 201.

19. Sohan Lal Suri, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 247, 261, 265 and III, pp. 297, 401, 438; B. J. Hasrat, *Life and Times of Ranjit Singh*, Hoshiarpur, 1977, p. 243.

20. Sohan Lal Suri, *op. cit.*, III, p. 350.

their origin in the Mughal traditions and had Persian terminology. But Punjabi titles such as *nirmal budh* were also introduced.

Ranjit Singh's administration was mainly on the pattern of the Mughal administration and the terms used were mostly Persian. In fact, Persian was adopted as official language and all records were maintained in Persian. Therefore, most of the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim officials had obtained the workable knowledge of this language. But it must be remembered that more than any other language the Punjabi had become popular amongst these officials. At the Maharaja's court most of the administrative work was conducted in Punjabi language and the Maharaja and his officials were thoroughly conversant with Punjabi. The Maharaja held discussions with his officials and took decisions in Punjabi. The same were, then, rendered into Persian.

The appointments of *Nazims* in the province and *Kardars* in the *parganas* were made on the basis of their ability irrespective of their caste, colour and creed. Under the orders of the Maharaja these officials were required to strictly follow the policy of secularism and the violation of the royal orders attracted punishment. No discrimination was ever made between the Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims in respect of state taxes. According to Gordon, "The Sikhs retained special privileges as the ruling race. As landowners they were lightly assessed, while all others were heavily taxed."<sup>21</sup> But Gordon's observation seems baseless in the absence of any contemporary source corroborating it. Contrary to it, under the orders of the Maharaja Sayyids (Muslims) were given special concessions in respect of land tax.<sup>22</sup> All were equal in the eyes of law. Respecting the sentiments of the Hindus and Muslims, the Maharaja had given them the option to get their cases tried according to the customary practices of their respective castes or religions. And whenever they so desired the cases of the Muslims were tried by the Qazis and Muftis and those of the Hindus by the Pandits.<sup>23</sup> Ranjit Singh's policy regarding agriculture, trade and industry did not brook discrimination between the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Consequent upon this policy the prosperity that accrued to the Punjab benefitted immensely the people of all the three communities referred to above.

21. Gordon, *The Sikhs*, Reprint, Patiala, 1970, p. 114.

22. N. K. Sinha, *Ranjit Singh*, Calcutta, 3rd edition, 1960, p. 149.

23. Fauja Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

Ranjit Singh had given full religious freedom to the people of all the communities. Each member of his subjects was free to offer prayer at his own place of worship. Besides Sikh women, Ranjit Singh had married many Hindu and Muslim wives. Mehtab Devi, Raj Banso (both of them were the daughters of the late Sansar Chand Katoch), Raj Devi, Devno Devi and Har Devi were the Hindu wives of the Maharaja.<sup>24</sup> They continued to worship their own gods and were free to practise the Hindu rituals and ceremonies. He gave due respect to the Hindu temples, the Brahmans and the holy water of river Ganga. He gave them charity liberally. He often consulted the Brahmans and astrologers before initiating important works. He frequently practised *sankulp* and *tuladan* in accordance with the Hindu rite. Moran and Gul Bahar Begum, the Muslim wives of the Maharaja, were free to recite *Quran*, offer *namaz* and observe other Muslim practices. Gul Bahar Begum built for the Muslims, at state expense, a mosque at Lahore which is still extant.<sup>25</sup> Ranjit Singh always showed respect to *Quran* and the mosques. A Muslim, who could recite the whole of *Quran* from his memory (*hafiz*) received a liberal grant from the Maharaja.<sup>26</sup> It is said that once a Muslim calligraphist prepared a very beautiful copy of the *Quran*. As no Muslim chief came forward to purchase the costly manuscript, the calligraphist got disappointed. When the Maharaja came to know of it he purchased the manuscript, paying to the owner the demanded price of ten thousand rupees. The Maharaja gifted this copy of the *Quran* to Faqir Aziz-ud-Din who was present there at the time of deal.<sup>27</sup> Ranjit Singh often visited the holy mosques and mausoleums to pay his obeisance to them. For example, after the occupation of Lahore in 1799 he visited the Badhhahi Masjid built by Aurangzeb and the mosque of Wazir Khan to pay his homage to them.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, in 1818, after the conquest of Multan, on the day of *Id-ul-fitar*, the Maharaja visited Shah Abdul Maali's mausoleum which was built by Mian Ghausia and joined the Muslim devotees in their prayer.<sup>29</sup> The Maharaja had permitted the Muslims to continue

24. Bhagat Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

25. Waheed-ud-Din, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

26. N. K. Sinha, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

27. Waheed-ud-Din, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

28. Khushwant Singh, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, London, 1962, p. 39.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

the practice of *azan* – a call to offer *namaz*.<sup>30</sup> Earlier, on the occasion of the festival of Muharrum the Muslims were allowed to prepare *tazias* in their houses but they could not bring them to the streets. When the Maharaja found the Muslims unhappy over this ban, he lifted it and allowed them to bring the *tazias* to the bazars also.<sup>31</sup>

The Maharaja participated in the religious festivals of the Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, some of which were celebrated jointly by them. The festival of *Basant Panchmi* was celebrated with great eclat. On this occasion the courtiers wore clothes of yellow colour. The Maharaja and the people belonging to the three communities collectively visited the mausoleums of Madho Lal and Husain to pay their homage.<sup>32</sup> The festival of *Holi* was celebrated jointly by the Hindus and the Sikhs. They were joined by the Maharaja and the princes. The colours were sprinkled on one another. The Sikhs as well as Hindus participated in the fairs held at Anandpur and Kiratpur. On the occasion of *Baisakhi* festival the Maharaja visited Amritsar for a dip in the holy *sarovar*. After *sankulp* the Maharaja gave away horses, elephants, cows, buffaloes and gold and silver utensils to the poor in charity.<sup>33</sup> During the festival of *Dusehra* the Maharaja went through the ritual of the worship of arms like the Rajput warriors and arranged mock battles between his troops to commemorate the battle of Rama against Ravana. At *Diwali* all public buildings including royal palace and houses of the Hindus and the Sikhs and of some Muslims were illuminated. On this occasion there was a big *tuladan*. The Maharaja was weighed against gold and that gold was distributed among the poor people of all the communities.<sup>34</sup> Other common festivals of the Sikhs and the Hindus were those of the *Kali Devi* (in June), *Nag Panchami* and *Gugapir* fair (in August), etc.<sup>35</sup> The Maharaja sometimes partici-

30. A deputation of the Sikhs from a part of Lahore, waited upon the Maharaja and complained that they were finding it impossible to put up any longer with the loud voice of *azan* in the local mosque five times a day. On the suggestion of Faqir Aziz-ud-Din, the Maharaja ordered to stop *azan* on the condition that the Sikhs would go to every Muslim's house and summon him to prayer five times a day. But a week later the Sikhs came back, looking more worried than ever and prayed that *azan* be reintroduced. The Maharaja agreed to their request. See Waheed-ud-Din, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

31. N. K. Sinha, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

32. Khushwant Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

33. Sohan Lal Suri, *op. cit.*, III, p. 204.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 269.

35. B. J. Hasrat, *op. cit.*, p. 389.

pated in the celebration of the Muslim festival of *Id-ul-fitar*, and during Muharrum young princes used to make offerings (*nayaz*) as if they were Muslims.<sup>36</sup>

In giving religious charity the Maharaja was liberal not only to the Sikh *Gurdwaras* but to the Hindu temples and Muslim mausoleums also. He gave big amounts to the *Gurdwaras* as Sri Darbar Sahib, Akal Bunga, Dera Sahib, Tarn Taran Sahib, Damdama Sahib, Fatehgarh Sahib, and *Gurdwaras* at Mukatsar Sahib, Khadur Sahib, Kartarpur Sahib, Thamb Sahib, Baoli Sahib (Goindwal) and Anandpur Sahib.<sup>37</sup> He gave a huge amount for the Harimandir Sahib (Amritsar). On the *sankrant* of every month and on every *amavas* he went to pay his homage to the Harimandir Sahib and made very liberal offerings; there after he distributed gold, silver, cows, horses, buffaloes, etc.<sup>38</sup> It is said that in 1826 the Nizam of Hyderabad sent a very beautiful and precious canopy to Ranjit Singh as a gift. The Maharaja immediately sent it to Harimandir Sahib. It is believed that the embellishment done in gold in the present building of Harimandir Sahib, its paintings and other decorations were got done by Ranjit Singh,

The Maharaja made liberal offerings to the Hindu temples of Hardwar, Banaras and Jawalamukhi. Sant Nihal Singh writes that a Brahman of Banaras told him that it took thirty-three maunds of gold to plate the steeples of a temple there and Maharaja Ranjit Singh gave the precious metal for the purpose.<sup>39</sup> He made an offering of a good amount of gold and money to Jawalamukhi. According to Baron Hugel, "The golden roof of both the large and small buildings are most tastefully and richly executed and were the gift of Ranjit Singh, in testimony of his gratitude to the Devi, goddess, to whom he ascribed his recovery from a dangerous illness twelve years ago."<sup>40</sup> Relating the events of 1835, Sohan Lal Suri has recorded that the Maharaja made an offering of two gold canopies to the Jawalamukhi temple.<sup>41</sup> He spent a lot of money on the Muslim mausoleums and *dargahs*. On the request of the Muslims he got the mausoleums of Hazarat Data Ganj Bakhsh and Mauj-i-Darya, repaired, over which he had to

36. Waheed-ud-Din, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

37. Sohan Lal Suri, *op. cit.*, III, p. 195.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Teja Singh and Ganda Singh (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. ix.

40. Baron Hugel, *Travels in Kashmir and Punjab*, Reprint, Patiala, 1970, p. 45.

41. Sohan Lal Suri, *op. cit.*, III, p. 263.

spend a heavy amount. The Maharaja also gave *jagirs* for the maintenance of these mausoleums.<sup>42</sup> When Multan was annexed to the Sikh kingdom, the Maharaja assigned a permanent *jagir* of 3500 rupees a year to continue a free kitchen (*langar*) at the tomb of Pir Bahawal Haq.<sup>43</sup> There was a danger of the tomb of Hazrat Shah Bahawal being washed away by river Ravi. To protect it the Maharaja put up a bund at a great expense.<sup>44</sup>

Ranjit Singh maintained the Muslim tradition of giving grants to the Ulama by the governments.<sup>45</sup> After conquering Peshawar the Maharaja gave costly clothes to the local *qazis*, *sayyids* and *faqirs* and also granted *jagirs* for their subsistence.<sup>46</sup> He also gave *jagirs* to the *granthis*, *pandits*, *shaikhs* and *mullas*.

The Maharaja gave a clear proof of his secularism in the patronage of education, literature and men of letters. He gave liberal grants to schools that imparted education in Gurmukhi, Sanskrit, Mahajani, Arabic and Persian. For example, he gave *jagirs* and donations to the Sikh schools of Bhai Juna Singh, Bhai Lakhan, Bhai Ram Singh, Bhai Kharak Singh, Bawa Amar Das and Budh Singh, the Muslim schools of Mian Sahib at Batala, Maulvi Shaikh Ahmad at Sialkot and the Arabic and Persian schools at Lahore. The Sanskrit schools of Pandit Mula Ram and Pandit Jaswant were also given *jagirs* and donations.<sup>47</sup>

A large number of Sikh, Hindu and Muslim poets and scholars enjoyed Maharaja's patronage. The names of Budh Singh Lahori, Bhai Saundha Singh, Pandit Nihal Singh, Giani Sant Singh, Hakam Singh, Ram Das, Shiv Dyal, Sayyid Hashim Shah, Maulvi Ahmad Yar, Sawan Yar, Jafar Beg and Shah Muhammad are worthy of note.<sup>48</sup> In consonance with his secular attitude Ranjit Singh encouraged amalgam of the Mughal, Kangra and the Sikh arts of painting. The prominent painters of the Maharaja's court were Kehar Singh, Muhamma Bakhsh and Purkhu (of Kangra).<sup>49</sup>

42. Prem Singh Hoti, 'Character of Maharaja Ranjit Singh,' Teja Singh and Ganda Singh (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 221.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*

45. N. K. Sinha, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

46. *Ibid.*

47. G. W. Leitner, *History of Indigenous Education in the Punjab*, p. 15.

48. For details, see Piara Singh Padam, 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh te Punjabi, Fauja Singh and A. C. Arora (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 371-78.

49. Waheed-ud-Din, *op. cit.*, p. 121.



Some scholars believe that Ranjit Singh did not subscribe to the policy of secularism, rather his government was theocratic. In support of their contention they hold that the Maharaja was a devout Sikh who had an unshakable faith in the Sikh Gurus, *Guru Granth Sahib*, and the *Khalsa* tenets and he gave a significant place to Sikh religion in politics. He issued coins in the name of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. He liked to be addressed as Singh-Sahib and used the term 'Sarkar-i-Khalsa ji' for his government. He took pride in proclaiming himself to be the 'mere drum (*Ranjit nigarh*) of Guru Gobind Singh'. He did not add any title to his name 'Ranjit Singh' and did not allow any one else to adopt this name.<sup>50</sup> And the Maharaja had deep regards for *gurbani*. He regularly listened to the recitation of *Guru Granth Sahib* and the *Kirtan* for two hours daily. The Maharaja was always attended, on his tours, by a *granthi* (priest) with a volume of the holy *Granth*. Every regiment had its own volume of the *Granth* and the *granthi*. Before undertaking any campaign or a tour he would solicit the *hukam* from the holy *Granth* and acted or framed his programme accordingly. When unable to make up his mind upon any measure he had in contemplation, he took decision with the help of the *Guru Granth Sahib* and two slips of paper placed in it with 'yes' or 'no' regarding his plans.<sup>51</sup> The official from of salutation in army was—*Wahe Guru Ji Ka Khalsa, Wahe Guru Ji Ki Fateh*—The *Khalsa* belonged to the Lord, and victory also belonged to him. The Maharaja regarded all his victories as favours bestowed upon him by the Guru.<sup>52</sup> After every victory, out of gratitude he made offerings at Harimandir Sahib in Amritsar.

Despite all this, it would not be proper to brand Maharaja's polity as theocratic. Neither he allowed the leaders of the *Khalsa* Panth, the *granthis* or the *Akalis* to interfere in political affairs of the state nor he allowed any change in his liberal and tolerant policy towards the non-Sikhs. He did not impose any restrictions on the followers of any other sect or faith, rather he gave full religious freedom to them. The government never tried to convert non-Sikhs to Sikhism, though during Ranjit Singh's reign, a good number of non-Sikhs embraced Sikhism on their own. The Maharaja's deep faith in the Gurus and the

50. H. L. O. Garrett (ed.), *The Punjab, a Hundred Years Ago as described by V. Jacquemont and A. Solykoff*, Patiala, 1971, p. 49.

51. Osborne, *The Court and Camp of Ranjit Singh*, Reprint, Calcutta, 1952, p. 45.

52. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

*gurbani* that preach the principle of universal brotherhood, is the proof of his religious liberalism and not that of religious fanaticism. He put into practice the liberal views of the Sikh Gurus and the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Therefore, it may be said that the Maharaja's policy was not communal but non-sectarian or secular.

One of the arguments advanced against Ranjit Singh's secularism is that he had imposed many restrictions on the Muslim and European officials of the state. They were prohibited from eating flesh of the cow and smoking, and were required to grow hair on head and beard. But it may be argued in justification of the Maharaja's policy that he had banned cow killing in his kingdom because the Hindus and the Sikhs showed veneration to the cow and showing due respect to their sentiments, he considered this measure necessary. The other two restrictions were imposed in view of the Sikh sentiments. It can also be said that the Maharaja had framed a code of conduct for his courtiers and it would not be improper to consider these restrictions as a part of the special culture of the royal court. In fact, the Maharaja was a great realist and a wise statesman and he considered it essential to impose such restrictions in order to satisfy, in some measure, the communal Sardars who were unhappy with his policy of liberalism, these restriction may of course, be viewed today as insinuations against his policy of secularism.

From what has been discussed above it may be concluded that despite the circumstances in which he was placed the Maharaja adhered to the policy of secularism to a large extent. Perhaps, before Ranjit Singh no ruler of the Punjab, or that of the contemporary India, was so liberal and tolerant as the Maharaja was. Some Western scholars have misunderstood his magnanimous policy. For example, Jacquemont writes, "He (Ranjit Singh) is a Sikh by profession, a sceptic in reality. Every year he pays his devotions to Amritsar and what is singular, at the shrines of several Muhammadan saints yet these pilgrimages offend none of the puritans of his own sect."<sup>53</sup> The writers like Osborne,<sup>54</sup> M'Gregor<sup>55</sup> and Griffin<sup>56</sup> have condemned the Maharaja as an 'athiest,' 'unscrupulous,' 'hypocrite,' 'selfish,' etc. In fact, these writers have neither understood the tenets of Sikhism nor the benevolent policy of the Maharaja. They believed

53. Waheed-ud-Din, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

54. Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

55. M'Gregor, *The History of the Sikhs*, vol. I, Reprint, Allahabad, 1979, p. 118.

56. Lepal Griffin, *Ranjit Singh*, Oxford, 1893, pp. 113-14.

that Sikhism was opposed to the Muslims and the Brahmans and it was irreligious for the Sikhs to visit the Hindu temples and the *dargahs* of the Muslims. Probably it seemed strange to them that the Maharaja had appointed the Muslims and the Brahmins on high posts, and they were astounded at his visits to their holy shrines. Maharaja's religious liberalism was thus beyond their comprehension. Be that as it may, his policy of secularism was a great success. It was because of this policy that "Ranjit Singh gave the Punjab forty years of peace, prosperity and progress of an order which it had not known since the time of the Great Mughals."<sup>57</sup> Due to this policy Ranjit Singh's reign witnessed no communal riots and the Sikhs Hindus and Muslims lived in perfect harmony and goodwill for one another. The Maharaja elicited profound respect and love for all the three communities. Whenever he fell ill invariably all his subjects belonging to different faiths prayed in their respective modes for his speedy recovery. Nearly fifty years after his death Griffin writes, "Although half a century has passed since his death, his name is still a household word in the province : his portrait is still preserved in castle and cottage."<sup>58</sup>

57. Waheed-ud-Din, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

58. Lepal Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

## Unheeded Bequest of Maharaja Ranjit Singh

G. R. SETHI\*

The history of the Koh-i-Noor diamond could have been different had the keeper of the treasury, Missar Beli Ram, not betrayed Maharaja Ranjit Singh at the time of his death. An authentic account of his last wish to give this precious diamond to the Jagannath Temple is recorded by Sohan Lal Suri, a wakil and chronicler of the Maharaja's life.

Actually, the year 1839 had an ominous beginning both for the Maharaja and for Sikh rule. On January 1, 1839, according to an entry in Sohan Lal Suri's diary, the Sarkar (Maharaja Ranjit Singh) had gone for an outing and on return had entered the octagonal tower of the Red Fort and held a darbar. Meantime, he had an untimely motion and felt very weak. He took rest; the Sardars paid their respects and left.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh's weak health was closely watched by some of his ministers, physicians and Captain C. M. Wade, A. D. C. to the British Governor-General, who was accredited to the Maharaja's court. For nearly six months, the routine duties of his rule were carried on with precautions advised by the Maharaja's physicians.

### Charity

The Maharaja used to pay homage to the *Guru Granth Sahib* besides offering thousands of rupees in charity to the various temples, including offerings of gold made to a Devi temple on the advice of his priests. His *pandits* had warned him that the period from June 13 to 17, 1839, was inauspicious. On account of some kind of diarrhea the Sarkar had grown weak. The physicians were keeping him in good humour but his condition was growing worse day by day. When the Maharaja ordered gold plating of the Devi temple at a cost of Rs. 5000, Captain Wade had expressed anxiety about his health but his fears were met by a categorical statement that the Sarkar was all right.

On June 22, 1839, the Maharaja had a restless night, at times

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going out of his room without any assistance and at times betraying signs of drowsiness. Next morning he expressed a desire to be taken out in a carriage early in the morning and on his return he performed "sankalap," giving away horses, elephants, five gold vessels, cups, jugs, etc., besides 51,000 rupees in cash and two bangles. His courtiers tried to convince him that the cure of his ailment was in the hands of God.

The Maharaja realised the seriousness of his disease and his growing weakness. A "sankalap" is usually performed before one's last moments to invoke the blessings of the Almighty when the physicians have expressed their helplessness. In the afternoon he periodically became unconscious and revived. He complained of liver trouble. Gaining consciousness, he again prayed before the holy *Granth Sahib* by lying prostrate and some of his Sardars made "sarwarna" of 500 rupees to be donated in charity, circumambulating the money bag over his head or body.

Passing two more restless nights, he became unconscious again on June 26, 1839, but rallied slightly and bowed in obeisance to the holy *Granth Sahib* and large offerings were again made to the *Granth Sahib* and other deities he worshipped. When his condition became hopeless, all the near ones began to weep and his priests advised him to fix his eyes on the "Akai Purkh." A "sankalap" of 8 lakh rupees was made on the advice of his trusted priest, Bhai Gobind Ram.

In this state he removed his weapons from his waist and said that his last moments had come and some liquid medicines were poured into his mouth. He wanted a pitcher of Ganges water to be poured on his chest and this was done from a gold vessel. He wanted his special horses to be sent to Amritsar by way of offerings. Raja Dhian Singh served food to the ladies who had not eaten anything for two days.

#### **Last wish**

On June 27, 1839, the Sarkar sent for Missar Beli Ram and ordered him to offer the Koh-i-Noor diamond to the temple of Jagannath at Puri. Missar Beli Ram explained by signs that the diamond was in Amritsar. With wrinkles on his forehead the Maharaja cursed him by a wave of his hand and collapsed. He was made to lie on a specially prepared bed and costly embroidered shawls were laid over him. All his courtiers and family members began to weep. The exact time of

his passing away is not recorded but presumably it must have been during the night and thus all the funeral ceremonies were performed on June 28, 1839.

Although the *ranis* and maid-servants had offered to burn themselves with the Maharaja, they were dissuaded from doing so except for Rani Katochan who sat on the pyre with the Maharaja's head on her lap. It was a terrible sight; all the Sardars, his courtiers, family members and others were in tears. His eldest son, Prince Kharak Singh, performed the last rites wearing a *dhoti* and walking barefoot around the funeral pyre.

Sohan Lal Suri's last lines recorded in his diary are memorable. "Alas", it is a matter of great regret that yesterday he was king of the world, he was benefactor of the world, he was master of unlimited blessings, he was a cloud representing charity but today he mingled with dust and the eyes of the servants are weeping and struck with wonder, with tears falling and minds distracted.

Maharaaj Ranjit Singh's end also virtually sealed the fate of his empire as, with his death, intrigue in the family circles, among his courtiers, noblemen and beneficiaries had become marked, culminating in the advent of British rule in the north after barely a few years with a rapid end to his family and deporation of his minor son, Maharaja Dalip Singh. Rulers could learn a lesson from the pages of history which keeps on repeating itself.

(Courtesy The Tribune)

## Select Chronology of Maharaja Ranjit Singh

DEVINDER KUMAR VERMA\*

1751	Charhat Singh became the leader of Sukarchakia <i>Misal</i> .
1765	— established control over the city of Gujranwala.
1768	— conquered Jhelum.
1770	— died.
1780, Nov. 13	Maharaja Ranjit Singh born at Gujranwala.
1781	Mahan Singh occupied Madh and Moosa Choocha <i>talukas</i> in Shahpur.
1783	— gains control over Mianee.
1786	Ranjit Singh occupied Dode.
1788	— conquered Kot Nyna.
1790	Mahan Singh son of Charhat Singh died.
1790, April 15	Ranjit Singh became the head of the Sukarchakia <i>Misal</i> .
1791	— taken over Atalgarh and Bulaki Chak.
1795	— annexed Bheekho Chak and Shakargarh.
1796	— marriage with Mehtab Kaur.
1797	— occupied Narot and Jaimal Singh Sobati.
1798	— conquered the fort of Rasulnagar by defeating Jan Mohammad Khan.
1798, December	Shah Zaman entered Lahore second time.
1799, January 4	— leaves Lahore.
— July 7	Ranjit Singh occupied Lahore.
1800	— used his seal for the first time after the occupation of Lahore.
—	Battle of Bhasin.
end 1800	Munshi Yusuf Ali Khan, agent of the East India Company, arrived at Lahore Darbar, to establish good relations with Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

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- 1801, April 12      Ranjit Singh bear the title of *Sarkar-i-Wala* (became the Maharaja of Punjab) and anointed with *tilak* of *Maharaja* by Bedi Sahib Singh.
- Opening ceremony of a mint at Lahore.
- — got control over Kasur by defeating Nizam-ud-Din of Kasur.
- 1802      Ranjit Singh exchanged turbans with Fateh Singh Ahluwalia as a mark of perpetual friendship.
- — marriage with Moran.
- Kharak Singh born to Maharani Raj Kaur wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.
- Ranjit Singh occupied Dhani Pothohar and Chinnot.
- 1803      — first invision of Multan.
- 1804      Ishar Singh born to Rani Mehtab Kaur wife of Ranjit Singh.
- 1805      Ranjit Singh's second invasion of Multan.
- — visited Hardwar on the occasion of *Kumbh mela*.
- February 24      — occupation of Amritsar. Gurdit Singh and his mother were given *jagirs*.
- October      Jaswant Rao Holker visited Amritsar.
- 1806, January      First Anglo-Sikh Treaty. Lord Lake, Fateh Singh Ahluwalia and Ranjit Singh were the signatories of this treaty, with the help of General Lake, Ranjit Singh and Fateh Singh Ahluwalia drove back Jaswant Rao Holker from Amritsar.
- Ranjit Singh first expedition against the Malwa or Cis-Satluj States.
- — second expedition against the Malwa.
- Sher Singh and Tara Singh (twins) born to Rani Mehtab Kaur wife of Ranjit Singh.
- Ranjit Singh conquered Kasur.
- — annexed the territories of Tara Singh Gaiba.
- August 22      — conquered Kangra.



# SELECT CHRONOLOGY OF MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH

- 1808 — — third expedition of Malwa.
- — Cis-Satluj Sikh Sardars request the British for asylum or help.
- September 11 Charles T. Metcalfe Mission and the meeting with Maharaja Ranjit Singh took place at Khem Karan.
- November Ranjit Singh assured the Malwa Sikh Chiefs of his good will towards them.
- 1809, April 25 Treaty of Amritsar.
- May 3 Ranjit Singh's conquest of Jammu.
- By the Ittilahnama or proclamation all the Cis-Satluj Chiefs came under the control of British protection.
- 1810, February Ranjit Singh occupied Wazirabad.
- — meeting with Shah Shujah.
- February 7 — victory over Khushab and Sahiwal.
- February 18 — fourth expedition against Multan.
- 1811 — — annexed the territories of Faizullapuria and Kanahaiya *Misals*.
- 1812 Marriage of Kharak Singh son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.
- — Ochterloni's visit to Lahore.
- — Maharaja Ranjit Singh planned joint expedition with Wazir Fateh Khan against Kashmir.
- 1813 — sent expedition under Diwan Mohkam Chand against Kashmir.
- May 13 Faqir Aziz-ud-Din was sent along with Gurbakhsh Singh and Jamadar Khushal Singh to Shah Shujah to demand Koh-i-Noor diamond for the Maharaja and the latter was succeeded in getting the diamond.
- July 12-13 Battle of Hazro.
- 1814 Shah Shujah fled away from Lahore and sought asylum at Ludhiana.
- 1817 Ranjit Singh's fifth invasion of Multan.
- — sixth invasion of Multan.
- 1818 — appointed Sukhdial as the *nazim* of Multan.
- — handed over Peshawar to Atta Mohammad.
- June 15 — conquered Multan fort.

- 1819 Multana Singh born to Rani Rattan Kaur wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.
- Diwan Moti Ram was appointed as the governor of Kashmir (first term 1819-20).
- July 10 Ranjit Singh conquered Kashmir after the battle of Pir Panjal.
- 1820 —Occupation of Dera Gazi Khan.
- Hari Singh Nalwa appointed as the governor of Kashmir.
- 1821 Ranjit Singh occupied Mankera.
- Mai Sada Kaur was imprisoned.
- Diwan Sawan Mal was appointed as *nizam* of Multan.
- Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh born.
- 1822 Allard and Ventura joined the service of the Lahore Darbar.
- Dogra Gulab Singh was appointed as the Raja of Jammu.
- Crisis at Wadni.
- December 25 Ranjit Singh letter to Maharaja Man Singh of Mewar.
- 1823 Sikhs attacked on Peshawar.
- December Muhammad Azim Khan Barakzai, Wazir of Kabul, occupied the city of Peshawar by defeating his own brother Yar Mohammad Khan.
- 1823 Diwan Moti Ram was appointed as the governor of Kashmir (second term 1823-24).
- 1824, March 14 Battle of Nowshera and death of Akali Phula Singh.
- Sansar Chand Katoch of Kangra died.
- Vakils of Sind visited Lahore.
- Diwan Chuni Lal was appointed as the governor of Kashmir (1824-25).
- 1825 Misar Diwan Chand died.
- Kotla Fortress captured.
- Misunderstanding between Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Fateh Singh Ahluwalia.
- 1826 Dr Murray came to Lahore for the treatment

# SELECT CHRONOLOGY OF MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH

- of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.
- An agent of Nizam of Hyderabad (Deccan) came to Lahore with presents including beautiful canopy for the Maharaja.
- 1826 Kirpa Ram was appointed as *nazim* of Kashmir (1826-30).
- 1827 Declaration of *jihad* by Sayid Ahmad Khan.
- Fateh Singh Ahluwalia crossed over the Cis-Satluj territory.
- October Deputation of Lahore met Lord Amherst at Simla.
- Captain Wade, political agent of Ludhiana, visited Lahore.
- Court and Avitabile joined the service of Lahore Darbar.
- 1828 Dhian Singh Dogra received the title of *Raja-i-Rajgan Raja Hind Pat Bahadur*.
- 1829 Maharaja Ranjit Singh visited Gujrat, Wazirabad and Sialkot.
- —demanded Lailee.
- John Martin Honigberger joined Lahore Darbar service.
- 1830 Khalifa Sayid Ahmad Khan occupied Peshawar.
- 1831 Bahama Singh Ardali was appointed governor of Kashmir (1831-33).
- Battle of Balakot—the Sikh forces defeated Khalifa Sayid Ahmad Khan of Barailly.
- Alexander Burnes visited Lahore.
- Jacquemont, G.T. Vigne visited Lahore.
- October Lord William Bentick's meeting with Maharaja at Ropar.
- 1832 Joseph Wolf visited Lahore.
- Ranjit Singh's control over Derajat.
- —marriage with Gul Begum.
- April Col. Pottinger signed treaty with the Amirs of Sindh for the opening of the river Indus to the British trade.
- December 25 The British negotiated with the Maharaja to

- regulate the navigation of Indus.
- December 26 1833 Indus Navigation Treaty.  
Kanwar Sher Singh was appointed as the governor of Kashmir (1833-34).
- 1834 Col. Mehan Singh appointed as the governor of Kashmir (1834-41).
- Ranjit Singh's occupation of Ladakh.
- March 12 Shah Shujah of Kabul signed treaty with the Maharaja.
- November Supplementary treaty with the British for the navigation of Indus.
- 1835 Ranjit Singh's claim on Shikarpur.
- Baron Hugel visited Lahore.
- Dost Mohammad attacked Peshawar.
- 1836 Ghazipur rebuilt by Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh.
- Zorāwar Singh conquered Ladakh.
- 1837, March Marriage of Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh with the daughter of Sham Singh Attariwala. Sir Henry Fane visited Lahore.
- April 30 Battle of Jamrud — Hari Singh Nalwa died.
- Ranjit Singh ordered for the erection of a strong fort at Jamrud in the mouth of Khyber.
- November Captain Wade's meeting with Ranjit Singh at Lahore.
- 1838 Macnaughton mission reached Lahore.
- June 26 Tripartite Treaty amongst the British Government, Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Shah Shujah.
- Shah Shujah was ascended on the throne of Kabul.
- September 6 Birth of Maharaja Dalip Singh to Maharani Jind Kaur.
- November 29 Governor General Lord Auckland meeting with Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Ferozepur.
- 1839, May 19 British agreed regarding the duty of merchandise.
- June 27 Maharaja Ranjit Singh died.
- Maharaja Kharak Singh ascended on the throne.

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## Book Review

*Sikhism Today, The Crisis Within and Without* by Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia, Published by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh, 1987, pp. 82. Price Rs. 55-00.

This publication, in fact, is an anthology of articles written by Dr Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia in some of the country's leading newspapers and they reveal the wide sweep of the author's learning and knowledge on various facets of the contemporary Sikhism. The author has ably tried to lay down guidelines for those at the helm of affairs to build up a united, a strong and integrated India based on pluralism which would bring in unity-in-diversity. Ajit Singh Sarhadi of Chandigarh in his 'Preview' correctly asserts that the book is worth study by every Indian who has good of the country at heart.

The author in his well rehearsed introduction hints upon academic perspective that would facilitate re-integration of the Sikhs with the national body politic—a perspective essential for promotion and maintenance of the Sikh identity on the one hand, and unity and integrity of the country on the other.

It may be recalled that in the process of unification of the country into one national entity in the post-independence era, one dimension of the problem concerns the integration of the minorities. The author perceives that the superimposition of the Western political structure may be partly federal in character but mainly unitary in content has alienated the Sikhs in their corporate being on political level. Their (Sikhs) attitude and aspirations are caught in dilemma rooted in the process of unification and modernization, created in their mind the 'fear complex' of their being swamped or over-whelmed. The fear stands related to the widening gaps in the level of integration and modernization. The issue has been linked up with state rewards and patronage on the one hand, and with patterns of 'interaction' between the majority and minority communities on the other. The Sikh Community caught in the dilemma wants unification, integration and modernization within limited parametres. It wants a diversified interaction pattern, and yet wishes to be very much attached to their own traditional socio-culture ethos.

The study has sought to identify challenges faced by the Sikhs, the reasons that promoted the individual and corporate self-expression of the community. The Sikhs sought to retain their identity which is only opposed to assimilation but not integration. The author argues that they (Sikhs) have always pursued their corporate identity in unambiguous terms on different occasions but this can never be said to have led itself to separatism and secessionism.

Prem Bhatia, the former Editor-in-Chief of the Tribune Group of News Papers, Chandigarh, in his well worded foreword has explained that the important aspect of the unfortunate situation in which Punjab finds itself today is a sense of alienation in a large section of the Sikh Community. He opines that feeling persists among members of the community that they are not trusted and that their bonafides are suspect. Allied to the sense of alienation is the much older and deeper awareness in the Sikh Community of a distinct identity which does not come in conflict with a national personality but is often mistaken as a separatist sentiment. Prem Bhatia elaborates further that in the emotional and political storm through which Punjab has been passing, it has been practically impossible to examine the question of identity with cool detachment. Yet it is essential that not only Punjabis themselves but also people in the rest of the country understand the Sikh craving for an identity in the perspective of history, both past and contemporary. The Sikhs have been the product of a historical process of the Hindu-Muslim hegemony over India, leading to the emergence of a new community. With the independence of India, this community has found itself facing a new political system seeking 'unity-in-diversity' in plural social order. To this challenge the Sikh Community seems to have responded in positive terms while at the same time, also trying to retain its own distinctive identity and character.

With regard to 'inter-community interaction,' it is strongly felt that the Sikhs face almost similar problems as any other group of people belonging to the other section of the minority segment in India. In the mingling there are strong evidence of cooperation, sympathy, helpfulness, sharing of festivities despite personal conflicts, tensions and serious disagreements. The overall impression which unfortunately persists is that Sikhs have yet to forge and consolidate bonds of harmony and unity and it would not be unpalatable to say that amiable and consistent efforts by the community leaders have been conspicuously

absent in this regard particularly in the recent past.

The Sikh Community in India, like other minorities, is in the grip of a struggle, of (a) retaining its own identity and (b) yet equating or identifying itself with other communities in the country. This book seeks to find out the prospects of success in this effort, as also the problems and dilemmas that face the community in its quest of national integration on this pattern.

In the above context Dr Ahluwalia for the first time has very intelligently and boldly raised the following questions in his study :

1. Has Sikhism reached an impasse where it requires an internal reformation for its survival and progress ?
2. Do Sikhism and contemporary Sikh Community have a common destiny in the sense that the survival and progress of the one depends upon that of the other ? Or do they have distinct destinies ?
3. Will Sikhism provide a living ideology that could answer to the cultural, social and political concerns of the Sikhs arising out of their ethno-social and ethno-political development as an ethnos in interaction with the surrounding realities ?
4. How to square up the religious institutions and structures, inherited from the Sikh historical tradition, with the institutions and structures of the Western democratic secular tradition as these have developed in our country ?

The author contends that the ideological dimensions of the situation require to be well understood and disseminated for a proper analysis and assertion of the Sikh perception in the recent social and political reality in the country ; therein lies the abiding solution of the Sikh problem which has already become 'internationalized' with many outside elements and interests jumping into the fray.

The author asserts that in this context it is essential to understand that the contemporary Sikhism has become self-conscious in the process of its self-development. This consciousness of self-identity should not be confused with the so-called Sikh fundamentalism in the negative sense of the expression, but should, rather be distinguished from the latter, and appreciated as such. The author further delineates that religious fundamentalism is a global phenomenon which may be progressive in one context and reactionary in another circumstance. In India today, religious fundamentalism in its various Hindu, Sikh and Muslim forms has started playing these roles : progressive and reactionary ; complementary and mutually contradictory, and even

self-contradictory.

While drawing from the past, Dr Ahluwalia in his mood of introspection, suggests that Sikhism was conceived to play the forerunner role in the socio-politico-economic transformation. That Sikhism was to be the vanguard of the Indian people is clear from the fact that Sikh philosophy is a stage in the development of Indian thought, and is intimately related to Indian heritage, its myths and legends, its saints and heroes. Dr Ahluwalia further intercedes that the Sikh polity is neither communal nor unitarian in character. Religious unitarianism, as well as religious totalitarianism, is repugnant to the spirit of Sikhism. Religious, cultural and political pluralism is the message of Sikhism for the contemporary world afflicted by the growing trends of state totalitarianism, political unitarianism and religio-cultural homogenisation.

The author laments that the Sikh intelligentsia has not risen to the occasion to encounter the inevitable question which Sikhism is facing today ; the Sikh intelligentsia instead is engrossed in abstract scholastic matter of the past ; while being evasive or unconcerned with the present day fundamental issues of ideological nature. Perhaps one of the reasons is the attitude of the establishment that either does not take the intelligentsia in any reckoning or looks down upon them suspiciously. The intelligentsia should, rather, be encouraged to become a medium to bridge the gap between the state and the society, as also between various communities in India. It is also the need of the time that the intelligentsia should help the contemporary Sikhism to evolve a new, living and acceptable practice in tune with the imperatives of democracy and secularism and the challenges of modern civilization. But the trouble is that the Sikhs are being dragged and bogged down in the past. Perhaps, the Sikhs relish living in the past ; if so that is their greatest tragedy.

Although this work as viewed above is of high merit in its applied and utilistic aspect yet its importance would have been further enhanced if Dr Ahluwalia had tendered some explanation of the phenomenon of the demurred spectrum of ever widening economic gaps and the fiscal disparities accompanied with the growing apathy, insensibility, stoicism and corrosive and venomous corrupt practices both in the society and the establishment. The author should have coaxed the concerned quarters to understand the basic urges of the Sikhs who are simple and rustic, having the basic tribal instincts and urges in their blood

and ways of living. Their (Sikhs) supreme and glorious sacrifice for the cause of the liberation of India (not of Punjab) should be properly understood in historical perspectives.

The author of this work deserves commendation for his very bold, frank and fearless treatise. This book is an admixture of both theological and psycho-socio-religious history of the recent times. The author on occasions digs in the past to prove his point of view. The book in its beautifully done slim cantour conjures up procession of thoughts which can at once be helpful in its application on the present day impasse in which the Punjab is finding itself to be. It will not be an exaggeration to repeat the words of Dr Gopal Singh, Governor of Goa, who wrote about the author, "It needed a man of very high scholarship, deep commitment to the basics of the Sikhs faith and to history who could make out a case for locating the genesis of the Sikh identity." Dr Ahluwalia in this book appears to have redeemed the desire and love for learning; he can be said to be an explorer, innovator and a challenger in this field.

GURSHARAN SINGH\*

## II

*The Akali Struggle—A Retrospect* by Dr Mohinder Singh, Atlantic Publications, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 272, Price Rs. 225/-.

In the early twentieth century the Sikh politics in the Punjab pivoted around the liberation of the gurdwaras from the corrupt hereditary officiants—*mahants*. 'The Shiromani Akali Dal' from its very inception realised that the amelioration of the Sikh shrines should be its basic aim. For this purpose they realised that the control of the gurdwaras should be wrested from the religious functionaries. In this revised version the author has skillfully elaborated on the history and evolution of Sikh religious institutions and their eventual mismanagement and misuse by the *mahants*. To counter the infiltrating evil and mal-practices of the *mahants* in the gurudwaras Akalis began to struggle for reform. Britishers were always with the element of vested interest and backed the *mahants*.

Britishers understanding of the Indian reality through sectarian

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outlook also influenced the Akali attitudes. Initial abatement of the *mahants* by the Britishers impelled the Akalis to confrontment. The institution of gurudwara with the passage of time had become the centre of religious, social, cultural and political life of the Sikhs. Huge income from the large chunk of eleemosynary lands attached to these shrines made the *mahants* apostates. The movement to gain the control of the shrines was on the onset purely religious, but later on it turned into a political one in the wider framework of freedom struggle. With the government's involvement in this affair, the Indian National Congress appeared on the scene. The Gurudwara Reform Movement of Akalis now began to be associated with national struggle for freedom. Since the nature of Akali struggle was essentially non-violent this brought them into the mainstream of Indian nationalism. With increasing popularity and strength of the movement even authorities readjusted their policies to combat the same. The gurdwaras came under Akali's control one after the other. Over the keys affair the Akalis definitely came out victorious and were acclaimed by nationalists; they became an important factor in the struggle against British imperialism in the Punjab. At the same time they were actively striving against oppressive attitude of the Sikh native princes. The Akalis were involved in Nabha Affair too. Ironically almost all the stalwarts of present Akali politics hail from the region where they faced a strong and determined opposition from the native rulers.

The author has also elaborately discussed Shiromani Akali Dal and Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee in the light of present times and situation. Along with their brief history and working, the author has delineated the fallacies of their leadership and management. The Akali Movements of the past had a definite goal and nothing was compromised to achieve it. Even the Babar Akali Movement was in tune with that of the Akalis. They never resorted to killing of the innocents. Although the Government tried its best to curb the Akali struggles yet it had to pass the Gurudwara Act in 1925 which came into force in the month of November of the same year. After an amendment in post-independence era, it created a new situation by which the S.G.P.C almost attained the status of a 'State within a State' on the model of Vatican, its President has been described as 'the Pope of the Sikhs'.

In post-independence era of Indian politics Akalis were anxious to capture power in the Punjab and experience the glow of freedom which was promised to them by the Congress stalwarts (p. 163).



The Congress had a policy of monopolising power at centre and provincial levels which culminated in clashes between them. First major Akali agitation after independence was for the Punjabi Suba. This was demanded purely on language basis but Punjabi Hindus due to some political motivation disowned their mother tongue. Some of the Akali leaders were also to be blamed for making this a communal issue. Although, Akalis did get a 'Punjabi Suba' after a sustained effort and strong agitation yet 'The New Punjab' was not the one Akalis demanded and hoped for.

According to Dr Mohinder Singh, 1970s brought in a new creed of power hungry Akali leadership. Now in their aspiration for power Akalis ignored the demands of the masses who had returned them to power. Due to their internal petty jealousies they could not form a strong and stable ministry and the Centre took advantage of the situation by creating more dissensions.

Author has been quite successful in delineating the prevailing confusion in the Akali Dal, and their clashes with Congress dominated Centre which have resulted into the present day tragic situation of the Punjab. The author claims to have used some proscribed literature and some private papers available in India and abroad which throw fresh light on the issue.

Dr Mohinder Singh has quite successfully and meticulously studied the Akali retroactive and present strife for justice and power. This work originally is author's doctoral thesis which was published under the title *The Akali Movement* by the Mac Millan Company in the year 1978. The present work entitled *The Akali Struggle—A Retrospect*, is a revised version of his first book. Being a pioneer in this field he has done useful research on the topic. The addition of the ten appendices in the book will be of immense use to the readers.

The book, like the previous one, is a useful study for the student of history. The author has scientifically traced the history of the Akali struggle from its infancy to date and has been quite methodical and objective in his treatment of the topic.

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